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No. 12.

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**MEZZONI
THE BRIGAND.**

BY
LIEUTENANT MURRAY

NEW YORK

STREET & SMITH

PUBLISHERS.





MEZZONI THE BRIGAND.

THE SEA AND SHORE SERIES—No. 12.

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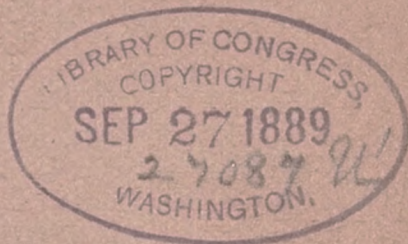
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MEZZONI THE BRIGAND;

OR,

THE KING OF THE MOUNTAINS.

BY



LIEUTENANT MURRAY,

AUTHOR OF

"THE MASKED LADY," "SPANISH MUSKETEER," "SCARLET
FLAG," "THE ITALIAN CONTRABANDIST," etc.

NEW YORK:

STREET & SMITH, Publishers,
31 Rose Street.

(1889)

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MEZZONI THE BRIGAND.

CHAPTER I.

KING OF THE MOUNTAINS.

Until quite lately the mountain region nearest to Naples, in the neighborhood of Salerno, Amalfi, and beyond, has been the most famous resort for brigands anywhere out of Spain.

It is less than six months since a rich Englishman was seized, between Salerno and the plains of Pæsturn, and held for ransom in a heavy sum, which was finally paid according to the terms dictated by these Italian banditti. The government has been compelled for years to virtually admit its inability to cope with these active and dangerous mountaineers, whose guerilla warfare baffles all legitimate military operations. The local peasantry of the dangerous districts are nearly always in league with the robbers, and being faithful to their interests, form in one sense part of the organization.

It is almost impossible to obtain any information as to the haunts of the brigands, or to procure the services of capable guides to lead any expedition against them. Were the poor peasants inclined to

act in this capacity, they dare not, as the savage revenge of the outlaws would be sure to follow. Thus the government is in the worst possible situation as it regards protecting travelers from abroad, who are attracted to these classic spots in considerable numbers annually.

Until the advent of Victor Emmanuel, the boldness of the banditti in this region often led them into the very streets of Naples, and robberies were frequent under the very shadow of the king's palace, while a passage at night through the long and lofty grotto of Posilipo, near the heart of the city, was a risk that few travelers cared to encounter. To reach the beautiful shores of Baiæ, or return from thence, the Posilipo passage is the direct route, so that great inconvenience was realized by the visitors to Naples.

This standing disgrace upon the government has been a great source of mortification to Italy, and the aggravating cases of complaint arising therefrom has caused more than one foreign nation to make it the subject of official reproach through the medium of its local consul. Though this pest is not even yet entirely removed, still comparative safety is insured to ordinary travel.

How well we remember visiting the beautiful Baiæ region some years ago, when our party dined on the terrace of an Italian inn, looking down upon the loveliest bay the sun ever shone upon. In the distance was purple Vesuvius, emitting the only smoke wreaths that dimmed the transparent atmosphere with Procida and Ischia rising through a golden mist in the west. A couple of Italian men-of-war and numerous coasting vessels lay at our feet, with every spar and line of cordage duplicated in the blue

waters, the whole backed by the craggy, indented shore, with its stern, confused, volcanic rocks, its gay villages and its low fishing huts, hiding and displaying ruins which dated from the earliest steps of civilization.

What an accumulation of wonders we had seen that eventful day since our three black horses abreast, decorated with plumes and bells, had swept along the gay Chiaja in the morning. Through that famous grotto of Posilipo, a passage which had echoed to the tramp of Roman legions, away to the half-extinct crater of Solfatara, and to the neighboring grand amphitheater, with its wild beasts' dens, the quarters of the gladiators, and the main walls extant.

Here thirty thousand spectators sometimes assembled to see men in the prime and vigor of life "butchered to make a Roman holiday."

Classic ground indeed!

And there, too, were various temples, all in partial ruins, as they should be after a thousand years and more. In the temple dedicated to Mercury, the Neapolitan peasant girls had danced with bare feet, for our amusement, the Tarantella, to the accompaniment of their tambourines.

Altogether it was a day to be long remembered, that delightful experience in the environs of Naples. But to our story of these Italian brigands.

When Garibaldi, that gallant soldier of the people, the leader of the red-shirts, had turned over to Victor Emmanuel the sovereignty of the southern portion of the peninsula, thus making perfect the regal splendor of his crown and completing the union of Italy, the grateful monarch would have ennobled the brave sailor and soldier. Garibaldi, however, de-

clined all remuneration and all honors, retiring quietly to his modest island home.

It was at this period that the king began to realize the distracted condition of affairs, and the disregard of law and order which reigned in the Neapolitan territory. Might made right. Brigandage prospered. The roads and streets were dangerous even at broad day. The local authorities were weak and inefficient, and little less than a reign of terror existed all over Southern Italy. The energetic monarch took in the position at once—the remedy was patent.

The strong arm was required and applied with earnest purpose, until in the cities and large towns something like order was at length established, in place of the reigning chaos. The most daring characters, who had long lived by defying the laws, now fled to the mountains, and here in isolated bands still defied the government.

The wild region which they made their home was almost inaccessible to those not familiar with the ways, and thus afforded a natural protection to the outlaws.

Though comparatively isolated, these resorts were yet sufficiently near to populous districts, and especially to the well-known routes of travel, to enable the banditti to make a hasty descent at any time, and to retreat with either prisoners or valuable booty, so that the rigor of the government in expelling the outlaws from the cities and large towns simply changed their field of operation.

Among the notorious characters who had successfully mocked the authorities for a series of years was a man who bore the name of Mezzoni, the daring leader of the most successful band that existed in the mountains. This man had a fame extending

all over Southern Europe, and had been the terror of citizens and travelers for a number of years. He was reputed to have amassed great wealth, to be very shrewd and cunning, and that he was able to outwit the government at all points, had been proven for years by his successful operations, especially in and about the environs of Naples.

Mezzoni was thoroughly informed of all matters that it interested him to know, and had means of gaining intelligence which was perfectly inexplicable to the authorities. It was believed that he always acted as his own spy, and his facilities for disguise and the assuming of any character which he chose to personate, rendered him one of the most dangerous villains of the time.

For a long while the officials believed that they must have some traitor among themselves, as it was impossible to make a movement against the banditti which was not anticipated by them.

This famous bravo had been known to penetrate into the city hotels of Naples, in female attire, where, under pretense of being a vender of coral ornaments, or some other local specialty, he gained the information which he sought, and retired unsuspected. And yet no description of his person existed which was considered at all reliable; he had somehow succeeded in frustrating all attempts at such exposure.

He was talked of as possessing prodigious strength, and being of a hideous aspect of countenance, a man of mammoth proportions, and blood-thirsty to the last degree.

Persons who had been kidnapped upon the road and held for ransom had never been permitted to see him personally, or if they had met him it was under

such cunning disguise that they knew him not. Even the police declared that his person was so entirely unknown to them that they might be brought into daily contact with him and yet not know it.

Among the Neapolitan peasantry he was called the King of the Mountains.

Still, even these people had never seen Mezzoni to know him; if he had ever appeared among them it was not in his true character. When the police, therefore, tried cunningly to bribe them, or to obtain any information through these simple people, they honestly shook their heads and declared that they knew nothing of the famous leader—of course, they would not have betrayed him if it had been in their power—but, doubtless, they spoke the truth.

Mezzoni had adopted an ingenious system of secrecy as it concerned himself, which was of great advantage to his various plans, enabling him to command success which in any other instance would have been impossible. It was universally admitted that without some very extraordinary means at his command, quite beyond the knowledge of the police, such good fortune could not have attended the robber's career, and superstitious people talked about a league with evil spirits.

The usual stories which circulate through an excited community were rife as to his doings. Some, of course, were untrue, but more were born of the florid imaginations of those who circulated them. By some of these he was represented to be little less than a hero, by others a fiend incarnate, while there were occurrences almost daily, quite authentic, which served to give an air of reality to those stories which were purely inventions, as it regarded the famous leader of the banditti.

The demand of a very heavy ransom and its payment to Mezzoni, through the hands of his agents, also a daring robbery of diamonds from a French traveling party, had together aroused the government to a state of great irritation, and the long-standing reward which had been offered for the brigand leader was doubled by a formal proclamation, besides a free pardon being promised to any comrades who should betray him to the authorities.

This offer was posted in all public places, upon the roads, upon the rocks of the mountain sides, upon the trees, and at all of the wayside inns. Indeed, every publicity possible was given to the great government reward as doubled in its former amount, and to be freely paid for the person of Mezzoni, or failing that, for his head. Government was at last in earnest, and every possible resource was brought to bear in order to get possession of the famous outlaw.

The price set upon the robber's head by this last increase now amounted to the extraordinary sum of fifty thousand dollars—a premium certainly large enough to command the best efforts to accomplish his arrest. Men of intelligence, who had never engaged in the detection of rogues as a business, were led to consider the matter, and Mezzoni found himself pursued with a vigor and resolve transcending that of any previous period of his eventful career. Only a brief quiet was caused by this official activity, and soon after the bravo was at work again as successfully as ever.

It was noticeable that no large band seemed to be operating together upon the roads or elsewhere, as most of the robberies which came to the knowledge of the authorities were committed by two or three

banditti at a time. A large number of men never showed themselves on these occasions, though it was believed that, if necessary, a signal would have summoned any required number where resistance was offered.

In the instance of the robbery of the French traveling party, before referred to, the travelers testified before the authorities that there was but one man visible when they were stopped upon the road. He, however, was armed at every point, and when the driver of the vehicle was ordered to halt, it was with a revolver pointed at his head. He was told, sternly, that if he obeyed he would not be harmed, but that if he offered to move from his seat or to start his horses until the robber bade him to do so, a bullet would be sent through his head.

The brigand then addressed the party within the coach, composed of a gentleman, his wife, and a maid servant, still holding his revolver cocked and ready for instant use. He told them that he did not desire to summon others of the band—raising a silver call which hung about his neck as significant of the manner in which he could do so—but that they had only to comply with his demands quietly and there need be no alarm.

The robber was very cool through all this; he was in no hurry; indeed, it was impossible, as the French gentleman said, not to admire his perfect *sang-froid*.

His first demand was for a casket of diamonds belonging to the lady; and it was perfectly plain to them that he knew their number, their value, and even their style of setting. He also designated, very understandingly, some other valuables which he desired, and which, of course, under the circumstances, it was thought best to give up quietly.

"Were you armed?" asked the examining officer.

"I was not."

"It would have been better, perhaps."

But the gentleman freely admitted that if he had possessed a revolver he should have hesitated to risk the lives of the rest of the party, being ladies only, by the use of a deadly weapon. He should have paused, however well armed, before provoking retaliation from one who was not only himself fully armed, but who could doubtless call any needed number to his aid in case of a struggle. With a male friend to help him, both armed, the Frenchman said he would have resisted, but not with two women dependent upon him alone. The robber had addressed them in excellent French, and was not by any means vulgar.

When asked to describe this man all were puzzled to do so. They could only say that he seemed to be a tall, stout-built man, with a heavy beard, and a disfiguring wound was also remembered as being conspicuous upon his left cheek just under the eye. But disguised, as he probably was, the description of his figure was not to be relied upon, though a scar upon the face might have been immovable.

When under such an excitement as attends upon an experience of this sort, few persons can trust to their memory to describe a figure seen but for four or five minutes, at most, and never before nor since.

The instance, before mentioned, when the heavy ransom was demanded and paid, was also so peculiar as to require mention in this connection, and as familiarizing the reader with the doings of these brigands who will enact so important a part in the coming chapters.

An Englishman had come to Salerno by cars, and

had there taken a vehicle for Pæstum, some twenty miles distant, to visit the famous temples there, and which are more than two thousand years old. He had stopped and breakfasted at a little inn by the road-side in Salerno, and was to return to Naples by a more direct route, so as to reach his hotel the same night.

It is a lonely and dreary road, and the traveler had put a pair of pocket pistols in his overcoat, though he scarcely thought it worth while to do so. But the Englishman was not destined to reach Pæstum on that occasion. About one league beyond Salerno the vehicle was suddenly brought to a standstill, the driver ordered to dismount, as he was riding one of the two horses, and to lie with his face to the ground. The terrified man obeyed instantly. The door of the vehicle was then thrown open, and the traveler was coolly ordered to get out by a man who presented himself before him, armed to the teeth.

As the Englishman got out of the vehicle he managed to seize one of the pistols, a small single-barrel weapon of the old style, which was in his overcoat lying upon the seat by his side. This he put into his coat-pocket, and then complied with the robber's order. Once outside of the coach he found himself confronted with but one individual, and felt that by waiting for the proper moment, he could use his pistol to such effect as to wound or kill the robber.

"You have no valuables about you," said the bandit, very quietly, holding his revolver cocked in his hand ready for use.

"Very true."

"I shall trouble you to sign a paper which I have here, and we will send it back to your friends in this

city, who will be so good as to forward money for your release."

"How much?"

"They will know," was the reply.

"Supposing I refuse?"

"You will not be so foolish."

"Why not?"

"Because it will cost your life."

"You are very confident.

"It is my style," was the cool rejoinder.

The brigand stooped down, and placing the paper upon his knee, was filling in a date and preparing it for signature when the traveler thought this was his chance, so stepping back a couple of paces, he aimed and fired his pistol at the robber's head. The man did not even raise his face, but coolly finished his penciled writing, then turning to the Englishman, he said, without the least emotion:

"Perhaps you would like to try your other pistol, as you have failed with this!"

"It seems that you are bullet proof," said the traveler, in amazement.

"Not exactly. When you next have occasion to dine at a country inn——"

"Ah, I understand, I will take better care not to leave my pistols in my outside coat-pocket."

"I see you understand the hint, which may be of future service to you."

The terrified driver was ordered to mount his horse once more, and to change his course as directed. The Englishman was offered the one alternative—to sign the paper or be shot, and he saw very plainly that the brigand meant exactly what he threatened. Indeed the man's imperturbable coolness astonished him, and he saw that he was entirely at his mercy.

The sum demanded for his ransom was left blank, but there was no use to hesitate, and he absolutely signed the paper to save his life. He then took his seat in the vehicle as directed, and it proceeded on a different road from that whence it had come.

After reaching a mountain path the driver was dispatched with the paper, addressed to the friends of the captured man, and he was paid to hand it to the landlord of the inn at Salerno, who would forward it. They were soon joined by a couple of men armed like the first, and from him they received certain orders relating to the prisoner, who was conducted by them to a secret cave many miles into the mountains. Here, after three weeks' confinement, the heavy ransom of five thousand pounds sterling was paid, and he was released.

These were two events which had so lately aroused the government and led to the doubling of the reward heretofore set upon the head of Mezzoni.

Still none of his comrades seemed tempted to betray him, though by doing so they could have secured pardon and independence for life. The same mystery remained. Sometimes for weeks there would be no overt act brought to the notice of the government. It was observable that no mistakes were made as to attacking the wrong parties, but all that were laid under contribution were attacked at the right time and place, and were called upon for valuables, which showed a previous knowledge of the victims, on the part of the brigands.

Every stranger who came to Naples was watched, and if found to be a desirable victim, he was sure to be met at some proper time and place, and relieved of his valuables. No petty thieving was indulged in.

The game must be worth the trouble it would cost or it was not interfered with.

CHAPTER II.

STAND AND DELIVER.

Just where the Strada di Toledo enters the great square of Naples, on which is situated the royal palace, and the St. Carlo Theater, was located a large jewelry establishment, the branch of a London Jewish house, and forming one of the richest collections of goods of that description in the city.

This store was the daily resort of the better classes, and commanded a heavy trade in diamonds and precious stones of all descriptions. It was located under the very shadow of the royal palace, and in the heart of Naples. One morning, about a month after the reward set upon the head of Mezzoni had been doubled, the proprietor of the establishment referred to came to his store at the usual hour, to find the watchful man, who slept inside, gagged and tied, while the most valuable goods had been quietly abstracted.

Of course the first thing to be done was to release the poor watchman from his painful situation.

It was noticeable that nearly the entire stock in the store had been overhauled and examined, only the richest goods, and those most portable, having been taken, while the heavy articles were left undisturbed.

The watchman's story was soon told.

He had been awakened from sleep, while he was lying upon the small cot, placed nightly for his use in the center of the shop, and a gag was placed in

his mouth at once, so that he could make no noise by way of giving an alarm. He was then tied securely to the bed in a recumbent position, and a sheet was thrown over his face. Here he had been obliged to lie, unable to move or speak, and hear the operations of the rogues.

Of course he could not see, and indeed he could hardly breathe, until the gag was removed in the morning. He could not say certainly, but believed that there were only two robbers engaged in the affair. They seemed to know everything about the establishment, and to have keys that opened all places which were secured by locks. There appeared to have been no hurry about the robbery; all was accomplished quietly, and with very few words spoken, as the watchman testified.

This bold and successful burglary created the greatest consternation in Naples. People began to ask each other what use there was in supporting an elaborate and expensive system of police if they were not able to prevent outrages so gross and damaging to the public interest as this robbery, within sight of their very headquarters. It was true that the Jewish house which had suffered received little sympathy from the trade generally in their line, as they were looked upon by the Italian jewelers as innovators and rivals to a considerable degree. But still the principle was the same, and who might be the next victim? was the natural query which merchants asked each other with consternation depicted in their faces.

Of course this robbery was attributed to Mezzoni, and seemed to be a sort of defiant stroke in answer to the doubling of the reward offered by the government.

The value of the goods abstracted was estimated at one hundred thousand dollars as the very lowest amount to be named. There was not the first clew as to where they had been conveyed, or indeed how the robbers had entered or left the store. Everything in the shape of windows and doors was found securely locked, and in the usual condition in the morning. Even the iron safe, which had been opened, was found to be locked after the valuables had been abstracted, and so with various drawers and small cases about the establishment.

The mystery only deepened on examination. No neighbor had heard any unusual noise in the night.

In twenty-four hours after the event special rewards were offered through every available channel, promising most liberally for any information. The police were set to work, and no steps were untried in the endeavor to discover the perpetrators of the bold and heavy robbery. Woolf & Co., the firm who had been the sufferers in this instance, telegraphed to London, and sent also a special messenger to consult with the head of the house, suggesting that a thorough and careful English detective be sent at once to Naples to ferret out the guilty parties.

Nothing was talked of at the clubs and in public places but the great robbery of Woolf & Co. It was more than a nine days' wonder, and seemed destined to be a lasting mystery.

Diamonds are always marketable and difficult to identify, especially when removed from their settings, but if any of the other articles were to be offered for sale, in their original shape, such careful description had been printed of them and distributed,

as to lead, it was hoped, to the detection of those concerned in their abstraction.

A young Italian clerk, engaged in the store, had been arrested on suspicion, but was finally released. Feeling justly aggrieved at his treatment, the youth at once brought an action for damages against the foreign firm, and having the sympathy of his countrymen with him, was awarded a handsome compensation for what he considered his injured honor.

"Will Woolf & Co. keep open?" asked one young Neapolitan of another at a club-house in the Strada di Toledo.

"Oh, yes, they are rich," was the answer, "and have only to draw on the London house for any amount."

"Every one agrees that it must have been Mezzoni to have accomplished such a job."

"Undoubtedly. And do you see again, this is a foreigner who suffers? Italians are not robbed."

"True, nor are they disturbed upon the roads. It is the French, English, and Americans who lose."

"Not always; but it is thought that wherever Mezzoni's hand is seen his countrymen are spared."

"After all, the rascal robs where he can realize the most, I suspect."

"There was that diamond robbery from the French party, and the heavy ransom from the Englishman, and as we see the jewelers, Woolf & Co., are foreigners again."

"Yes, these three jobs may be safely put down to the charge of Mezzoni."

"The rascal is intelligent. The Frenchman testified that he spoke to him in his own language."

"Ay; and the Englishman testified that he spoke to him in excellent English."

There was this peculiarity, as it regarded the operations of the King of the Mountains, that Italians did not seem to be put under contributions to supply his purse; it was foreigners only who were compelled to replenish his exchequer. This was undoubtedly one reason why the Neapolitans were not more restive under his depredations—they were not the immediate sufferers.

The activity of the government even was more the result of foreign pressure brought to bear upon it than from any sense of self-respect or regard for the sacredness of the law. They assumed a virtue if they had it not, and, after offering a heavy reward for the head of the famous outlaw, the officials seemed to think they had performed their duty.

About a month had transpired since the robbery of the store of Woolf & Co., when a party of Americans, consisting of two ladies and two gentlemen, who had been passing the day in examining that unequaled curiosity, the exhumed city of Pompeii, were just starting at twilight to return to Naples. They were all seated together in a two-horse vehicle, driven by an Italian coachman.

Scarcely had they got fairly under way upon the road, passing a very thinly inhabited section, when the carriage was suddenly stopped by a couple of men on foot, one pointing his pistol at the driver and informing him that if he moved from his seat, or started his horses, he was a dead man, while the other, presenting himself at the door of the vehicle, pistol in hand, demanded the purses and watches of the party.

One of the gentlemen instantly sprang out of the vehicle, and struck the highwayman a blow that felled him to the earth as though he had been hit

by a sledge-hammer. At this juncture the fellow at the horses' heads instantly fired a shot, which in turn caused the American to drop to the ground beside the fallen robber. The highwayman rose at once from the earth, and without seeming to notice particularly the blow and fall which he had experienced, still retaining his revolver, presented it at the other American, who was now hastening to assist his friend, and said in good English:

"You will simplify this affair very much by handing me your purses and watches at once. I have no desire to shoot you."

"Let them have them," exclaimed the terrified ladies, holding out their own, as the second robber now came to the side of the vehicle.

"I am unarmed, or I would shoot you first," said the American. "Have you murdered him?" pointing to his insensible friend, who still lay upon the ground.

"Your purses and watches first—there will be time enough to attend to your friend afterward," was the answer.

While the second robber rifled the person of the insensible man, those in the vehicle gave up their valuables, and in five minutes more both of the highwaymen had left them and disappeared in the fast-increasing darkness. Fortunately the American who had saluted the first robber with such a blow had only been stunned by a scalp wound from the other's pistol, but which came within an inch of taking his life.

Congratulating each other that they had only lost that which could easily be replaced the party were once more soon on their way to the city.

"That was a splendid knock-down argument of

yours," said the American, who had not been injured, to his companion.

"Ay; but fists against pistols stand no chance at all. If we had been armed there would have been a different ending to this affair."

"Should you know that fellow you knocked down were you to see him again?" asked the first speaker.

"Hardly; yet I saw one singular mark, I think. It was a long cut wound under the left eye."

"I saw that; such a wound as a saber cut might have left."

"The fellow had wonderfully bright eyes also."

"Like a tiger's," said one of the ladies.

The ladies, however, had been too much frightened at the sudden and unexpected assault to mark any personal peculiarities in the attacking parties. But now, quite reassured, they were devoting themselves to stanching the blood which still flowed from the scalp wound.

"Is it not outrageous, and almost beyond belief, that such an occurrence could happen so near the city?" said one of the ladies.

"If it were not for this wound," said her companion, "I should not care much. It is our first real adventure on this side of the Atlantic."

"It was positively foolish to show fight," said he who had been wounded; "but then one doesn't always stop to be prudent."

"There was some satisfaction in the blow you gave that villain. He fell as though he was dead."

There was the usual official ceremony gone through with by the police, and a grand flourish of pretended indignation and effort to arrest somebody, but as usual the activity blazed up for a moment, then ended in smoke.

“How much did you lose?” asked an official of the gentleman who entered the complaint.

“Four gold watches and about three hundred dollars in money,” was the answer.

“Anything more?”

“A dangerous scalp wound was received.”

“Ah, yes, that is recorded.”

All being booked by the official, here the matter ended.

CHAPTER III.

A GALLANT ACT.

The small steamer which plies between Naples and the island of Capri every other day during the summer months, is sure to be well filled with tourists who desire to see that marine marvel, the Blue Grotto, and visit the ruins of Tiberius' twelve villas, erected in honor of the gods. The boat starts early in the morning, so as to touch at Sorrento both going and coming, and returns to Naples before night.

It was on a bright April morning when the steamer left the city, well filled with American and English travelers, to make the usual round trip, that Walter Hammond, a young American, found himself on board. The boat was rather overladen with passengers, attracted by the promise of fine weather, but the entire trip being in-shore, smooth water was pretty sure to prevail, and little was thought about the matter. The steamer sped on her way safely, and all was as merry as possible on board.

By and by the steamer from Genoa hove in sight by the western entrance of the bay, and the Capri steamer turned considerably out of her course to give the passengers an opportunity to see the larger vessel come into the harbor under a full head of steam, each craft saluting the other by dipping its flag.

The two steamers were now so near together that the captains hailed each other, and were about to

separate, when the orders to the respective helmsmen were misunderstood, and the helm of one or both wrongly set. As both were under headway a collision was the inevitable result, cutting the smaller vessel open at her starboard quarter so as to endanger the lives of all on board.

The Capri steamer began to fill at once, the breakage being below the water-line, and with the utmost skill and activity in launching boats from both vessels, it seemed nearly impossible to save all the passengers. Walter Hammond had been to sea as supercargo to India and elsewhere, besides being naturally prompt and energetic in an emergency. To his activity and knowledge of the proper management of a boat, many persons owed their lives on that occasion. The great requisite in such a catastrophe is coolness and self-possession, which qualities he clearly exhibited.

Especially was this the case in the instance of a young English girl who, after being placed in one of the rescuing boats, with her father, was by some singular accident crowded over the side and into the sea. The boat was loaded with human beings to the very water's edge, and could not be turned about to pick her up, as she was swept away by the tide. Young Hammond was steering the boat, which had nearly reached the side of the large steamer when the accident occurred. Turning to the two oarsmen, he said:

"Pull to the steamer and get these people on board—be lively about it—then come after me."

"Ay, ay, sir," responded the seamen, redoubling their efforts at the oars.

While he spoke he had thrown off his coat, vest, and shoes, and now plunged into the sea, swimming

boldly after the girl, who was already some two hundred feet away, but still buoyed up by her dress, which was fast losing its sustaining power.

He called out to her:

"Spread out your hands flat upon the water, and keep them in motion."

"I shall drown!" she cried.

"No, you won't!" he shouted—"nothing of the kind. Keep your arms in motion."

"I shall drown!" was her only answer.

The young American was nearing the girl very fast, and all eyes were turned toward them; but the buoyancy of her clothes was gone, and at that moment she threw up her arms, and was indeed sinking.

Two more strokes and Walter Hammond had seized a scrap of her floating dress, and after a brief struggle, in which he was himself more than once submerged, he succeeded in getting her head fairly above the water, and struck out again for the steamer.

It was a hard struggle, for the stout swimmer was greatly impeded by his own clothing. But the small boat he had left having now got its load of people all upon the steamer's deck, was just turning to come to him, with the girl's father in the stern. The swimmer was breasting it bravely, holding the girl's head above the waves, frequently at the cost of his own head going under for the moment.

On came the boat, now driven wildly in the frantic efforts of the seamen to reach them before both should sink.

Walter Hammond could no longer make any headway, he could only sustain his burthen and his own head above the waves by his steady but very

moderate action of treading the water. The fact was, his strength was failing him rapidly, but the boat had reached them at last. One brave effort he made to help the girl as they seized her and drew her into the boat, and then he sank back into the sea, too weak and exhausted for further effort.

His own life came very near being sacrificed; but a boat-hook was thrust into his clothes, by which means he was drawn to the side of the little craft, and taken in by the strong arms of the two sailors. Here he sank insensible upon the bottom of the boat, and was pulled rapidly to the side of the steamer, where he was soon resuscitated, and in an hour was quite himself again. This was the singular and romantic introduction of Marion Bray and Walter Hammond.

Colonel Manius Bray was a retired English officer, who had come to Italy with his daughter at the close of her boarding-school career. The father was himself rather an invalid, suffering severely from chronic rheumatism, and had hoped to reap some healthful advantages from this summer trip in Southern Italy. He was a widower, and Marion was his only child, the relationship between them being one of the tenderest affection. The English girl was not yet twenty; but having lost her mother in early childhood, she had grown up self-reliant to a degree unusual in one of her age. She had enjoyed excellent educational advantages, and was very mature both in mind and in person for one so youthful.

Marion would have been pronounced handsome in any company. Her eyes were blue and large, with a natural tenderness in them that nothing could drive away.

The face was oval and tinted with the color of

health. Her hair was marvelously luxuriant and of a soft and delicate golden hue, presenting a rather striking contrast with her black eyebrows and long black eyelashes. She was above the medium height, and her figure was well rounded and graceful.

We need not here record the profuse words of gratitude expressed by the old soldier to young Hammond, nor those of the blushing and beautiful girl. Walter thought he had never seen a more lovely creature in his life, and he would have been happy to go through fire to serve her, as he had done through water, if it were necessary. It was very natural that an intimacy should follow hard upon such a very peculiar introduction, and thus during the next fortnight, in that city by the sea, these two were scarcely separated from each other for an hour of the sunny days.

The colonel could only act as an escort for his daughter to places where they could ride, as his lameness was of a nature to prevent his walking except with the greatest inconvenience and with two canes. But he did not hesitate to trust Marion to the care of the young American in their visits to the museum, art galleries, and other attractions within the city. Both of the young people spoke Italian, and were thus enabled to make the most of their visits and excursions about the Neapolitan capital.

Walter Hammond was engaged in mercantile life, and his present visit to Naples was in the interests of the house in New York, of which his father was the senior partner. He was just twenty-four years of age, and already a junior partner in the concern. His prospects in life were excellent, but his present possessions were not by any means large. He had

two sisters and a mother in America, and his father, after whom he was named, was a very wealthy citizen.

He was in the possession of robust health, was exceedingly strong and well developed, and in college, where he had graduated at eighteen, had always led his class in all athletic sports. He was an excellent shot with either rifle or pistol, and, as was the college custom, had carefully practiced the art of self-defense or pugilism. Thus, in matters of physical training, Walter Hammond had received as careful instructions as he had in mental culture. Few professional athletes were his equal.

His intercourse with Marion Bray had been a source of infinite pleasure to him; and after attending to his business matters at the usual hours, he was sure to be by her side. They had read the same books, and were fond of the same authors, and indeed were in consonance in nearly every matter of taste and refinement. The old soldier looked on with satisfaction at their most unobjectionable intercourse. He had never seen, he thought, a more manly and less affected young fellow.

"Where is Mr. Hammond to-day?" asked the colonel of his daughter one afternoon, when the young American had not made his appearance as usual.

"He said he should be busy all day to-day. You know he is dispatching a ship to America, and she is nearly ready to sail."

"That's right; he shouldn't neglect business that has been intrusted to him."

"He seems very conscientious about it."

"I like the man," said the colonel, pleasantly, as he blew the smoke of his Havana upward.

"We have reason to be grateful to him," said Marion, earnestly.

"Indeed we have; I should have lost you, my child, but for his daring and manly rescue."

"It was nearly the end of your Marion, that is a fact, papa."

"Such an act in France would have commanded the insignia of the Legion of Honor," said the father.

"It was bravely done," she murmured to herself, in a thoughtful mood.

"Does he ever speak of his family at home?"

"Oh, yes. He has a mother and father living and two sisters. He describes his mother so tenderly that I have fallen in love with her."

"I shall be jealous, Marion."

"No fear, papa."

And the fair young girl came to his side, parted the thin gray locks from his forehead and kissed him lovingly. He patted her cheek as he gazed proudly at his daughter. A carriage was called, and they drove out to watch the queer street scenes.

"Cleanliness and the free use of water are among the lost arts of Naples," said the colonel.

"And drainage a myth," suggested Marion.

"Ay; the city smells rank to heaven."

"Mr. Hammond calls it dear, delightful, dirty Naples," said Marion.

"Very good, it is both dirty and attractive," said the colonel. "A sort of beggar's paradise."

The old soldier spoke truly; there is no quarter free from beggary. Murillo's "Beggar Boy" is repeated every hour of the day. Lazarus and Dives jostle each other everywhere. The palace and the hovel are contiguous, starvation and abundance, ele-

gance and rags, are here in juxtaposition. There is no "West End" in Naples.

CHAPTER IV.

HELD FOR RANSOM.

No traveler would care to visit Pæstum but for the sake of seeing the ruins here, still extant, of Greek temples, and which form the sole attraction.

The locality now contains but one miserable tavern, the grounds being covered with thorns and weeds, and infested by snakes.

A straggling, sickly population, eaten up by the local fever and led by malaria, is a sad sight to behold. Even in ancient times, when Pæstum was rich and populous, it was noted for the unwholesome atmosphere which prevailed there.

However, to the student of history, it is a favorite resort for a brief hour or so, no traveler pretending to sleep there or in its immediate vicinity. To those who can appreciate the simple majesty of Greek architecture, Pæstum is a positive revelation, however pestilential and difficult of access. Six hundred years before Christ, this city of Neptune, as its original Greek name signifies, was a capital city of wealth and grandeur, where art and arms flourished, and its citizens reveled in the pride of life.

A party had been made up with a purpose of visiting the temples, composed of Colonel Bray, Marion, and an American lady and gentleman, who were to be joined by Walter Hammond—making a company of five persons.

They were to proceed by railroad to Salerno, and thence to go by carriage to the locality of the tem-

ples. But on the morning selected for the excursion Colonel Bray had received a note from young Hammond, stating that he found himself compelled to remain in the city, as his vessel was expected to sail that day, and he must be present to properly dispatch her at the custom-house, at the same time expressing his disappointment at not being able to join the party as proposed.

The colonel and Marion would have been glad to relinquish the trip, under the circumstances, were it not that the other members of the party had made their arrangements to go, and it would seriously interfere with their plans to defer it. So they all started at the usual hour, and left young Hammond to dispatch his ship for America, and which he had been engaged for some weeks past in freighting. It was most delightful weather, and the travelers were in fine spirits.

"I am very sorry to leave Mr. Hammond behind," said the colonel to his daughter. "There seems always to be one drawback to every excursion."

"He is so well informed about these regions," said Marion, "that through his intelligence one sees with increased interest and understanding."

"He is the very best of company anywhere," added the colonel, who had become very fond of the gallant preserver of his daughter.

"He has promised to go with us to Baiæ."

"To-morrow?"

"Yes."

"His ship will have sailed then, I suppose."

The party having reached the temples after a long and lonely drive, had passed two or three hours in their careful examination, and were on their return without having met with any important experience,

when they chanced to meet another party of tourists. From them they learned that brigands had been seen upon the road on the previous day, and one party had been stopped and robbed by them, between Pæstum and Salerno.

This was not very pleasant news to our party; it was already near nightfall, and a sense of undefined uneasiness gradually came over them. They knew of the occasional raids of the banditti, but the present was thought to be a perfectly safe time for their trip. While they were briefly discussing the matter they descried a couple of horsemen, just in advance of them, drawn up by the side of the road.

"Those men are waiting for us," said the colonel.

"Are you armed?" asked the other gentleman.

"No, I had no idea that it was necessary."

"I am in the same situation."

The suspense of the party was soon over, for as they came up abreast of the horsemen the two riders, after ordering the driver to stop and not dare to move on pain of being instantly shot, appeared one at each side of the coach, revolver in hand. One, who seemed to be the leader, said in very good English:

"Your valuables instantly—watches and purses. Time is precious."

"Who are you?" demanded the colonel.

"Masters of this road."

"Lucky for you we are unarmed," replied the Englishman, but, in common with the rest of the party, at the same time delivering up his watch.

"Take off your gloves, ladies," said the leading robber. "I will trouble you to make haste."

"What is that for?" asked the colonel.

"We will relieve them of further care of those dia-

mond rings," said the robber. "Not the gold ones, ladies, only those precious stones."

This part of the business having been accomplished the leader blew a shrill whistle upon a silver call hanging at his breast, and four men, bearing a Sedan chair, made their appearance from behind the rocky hill-side, where they had been waiting.

"You will all please get out of the carriage," continued he who had acted as spokesman, except you, sir," designating the colonel; "you are lame, and it is of no consequence in your instance."

"How did he know that?" thought the colonel.

Of course, there was nothing for them to do but to obey under the circumstances.

The moment that Marion stepped upon the ground she was instantly seized and placed in the Sedan chair, the door of which having been quickly locked the four men took the poles and disappeared with their burden so rapidly that the whole was accomplished before any one could have anticipated it or have interfered for a moment. Colonel Bray was frantic with rage, but he could do nothing against these armed men.

He was told by the way of pacifying him that his daughter would be respected and carefully attended by one of her own sex until ransomed by the payment of five thousand pounds. The time and place of payment would be duly designated, and in the meantime the colonel was told he might rest assured of the entire safety of his child, provided he kept good faith with the brigands.

Any attempt to ferret out the hiding-place of the banditti would be resented, and any legal or military interference would cost his daughter's life. This

might be depended upon. In vain were all pleadings and protestations of the old officer.

"We make no terms."

"Take me and release my child."

"It will not answer our purpose."

"My God! can I do nothing?"

"Pay the ransom," was the answer.

It was pitiful to see the old man's agony at thus being separated from his child. He lost all anger now, and tears only came to his relief. He could hardly realize the state of the case to have Marion thus torn from him before his very eyes. It seemed more like a troubled dream than like reality, and he looked wildly about him, as though he expected to awake and find relief.

Colonel Bray had struggled out of the vehicle, and though it was now nearly dark he refused to leave the spot, until at last he was overpersuaded by his companions, and came to realize that Marion was doubtless already half a league away from them.

During the time they had remained the brigands had quietly pocketed the booty taken from the party, and turning their horses' heads had walked away in no apparent hurry, following the direction taken by the Sedan chair containing Marion.

The colonel could not be pacified, but continued to regret the want of "fire-arms to fight these devils with," as he said.

"Even if we had weapons, you see how easily they could have summoned any number they had required to assist them," said the other gentleman.

"I should know the spokesman were I to meet him again," said the colonel, "though the villain's face was evidently disguised."

"How?" asked his companion.

"By a heavy scar under his left eye, caused by a saber cut, I should say. It was an ugly wound, and in a very conspicuous place."

"I saw that," said the other.

"I wonder if our driver was in league with the rascals?" said the colonel, in a low voice.

"I do not think so—he was too thoroughly frightened. There was no pretense about that. Even when he started up again he could hardly hold his reins."

The reader must not think that the situation was an easy one for Colonel Bray. What could he do? If he went to the authorities and demanded their aid, and troops were sent into the mountains to hunt up the robbers, he would simply imperil his child's life, but he could not hope to liberate her by such means. It was not a desire to punish the villains that now actuated him. It was to obtain possession of his child alive and unharmed, that he must strive. He knew enough of the system pursued by the brigands to believe that Marion would be safe in all respects so long as there was a reasonable prospect of the payment of the ransom. His policy was then clear.

Antagonistic means were to be avoided.

But the matter of the ransom was a serious one to him. He was not worth the amount of the sum demanded, being only an officer on half pay, and of very limited means otherwise. He began at once to see the awkwardness of his situation. He would give his very life to save his child, but that would not accomplish it. The brigands would have nothing short of the sum demanded—argument was of no avail.

Let those who think it so easy to bring the law to bear upon such a case, and to recover a lost one under such circumstances, recall the facts in the

abduction of the Ross child, which took place even in the very streets of a populous American city, and they will realize how difficult it is for justice, at times, to thwart intelligent and organized villainy.

Colonel Bray commenced immediately to look about him on his return to Naples. He exerted himself to his utmost, but he found that the prospect was not encouraging. It was next to impossible for him to raise the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars for the ransom. People sympathized freely with the situation of the father, but when it came to putting one's hand into one's pocket, oh! that was quite another thing. People shook their heads.

If he had been at home in England it might have been an easier matter to bring about. Where he was known and respected he might be trusted with a loan, especially for such a peculiar and imperative object. He soon saw that here in Italy he could do nothing, or at least not of sufficient amount to be of any real service.

In this condition of affairs he turned for advice to his young American friend, Walter Hammond. He could only offer the anxious father one thousand dollars, that being the extent of the letter of credit which he held for personal expenses during his absence from home.

He had a long and sympathizing conversation with the colonel. He was himself very grave in this emergency, for he had that day received a cable dispatch summoning him to America, and bidding him to start on the very hour that the vessel should sail, to freight which he had been sent to Naples.

"Read this, Colonel Bray," he said, showing him the telegram. "I would remain and try to assist you if it were not for this peremptory recall."

"You are needed, or they would not have telegraphed you in such words," he said.

"It must be so," said Walter, "but I cannot say how much I should like to serve you."

"Thank you," said the half-discouraged father. "You must obey your orders."



"YOU SPOKE OF A PAPER?"

"You say that no violence was offered to Miss Bray?" asked Walter.

"No, she was simply hurried into the Sedan chair, and borne away with all speed."

"The scoundrels," said Walter to himself, as he walked excitedly up and down the room.

"You spoke of a paper?"

"Yes, here it is," replied the colonel.

"A printed form?"

"Yes."

"This is systematizing villainy with a vengeance," said young Hammond as he read the elaborate and carefully prepared document.

Here the amount of ransom, the mode of final payment, the time allowed to collect the sum, and various other conditions were carefully detailed. It was evident that consummate skill and care, doubtless the result of long experience, had been taken to so hedge the brigands about, that nothing short of compliance with the demand could possibly be contemplated by the interested parties.

"What do you propose to do, my dear sir?" asked young Hammond of the colonel.

"Pay the ransom."

"Of course."

"That paper names six weeks as the longest period of delay recognized by the brigands, which means that after that period, the ransom not being paid, Marion's dishonor and death may follow."

"Horrible!" said Walter, nearly biting his lips through in the bitterness of his feelings.

"I will start, I think, for England immediately," said the colonel, "where, of course, in time, I hope to be able to get the necessary funds."

"It seems to be the only thing for you to do," said young Hammond.

"I am told that these outlaws religiously keep their promises, so we know what to depend upon," continued the father.

"Thank Heaven, she is safe then for the present," was the hearty reply.

"When do you leave?" asked the colonel.

"By steamer to Marseilles this evening."

"I should have been glad of your company as far as England."

"I must improve the quickest route, and travel night and day to Havre," said Walter. "May I transfer this bill of credit to your name?"

"I cannot consent even to the loan of such a sum from one whom I scarcely know at all, and yet to whom I owe so much of heartfelt gratitude."

"Take it, sir," urged young Hammond. "I have quite sufficient ready means for present use."

"In such an emergency——"

"You will take the loan. Very good," said Walter as he indorsed the bill over to the colonel.

"A thousand thanks," said the Englishman, with a trembling voice.

"Good-by, colonel, and may every success await your endeavors."

The two men shook hands and parted, the elder with a dejected look, the younger with a hopeful expression, and the elasticity of youth in every movement. After Walter had withdrawn from his presence the old officer leaned back in his chair and mused to himself thoughtfully. He seemed to have lost support by this separation, though he could not exactly say how. Sympathy is a growing necessity with increase of years, and that of the young always carries with it a sense of genuineness and strength.

"He is very generous to leave me his money," said the father to himself, "but when I was of his age, if I had been as intimate as he has been with Marion, I could not have dismissed the matter of her present danger so easily as he has done. Why, had a lady of my acquaintance been thus unfortunate, nothing

could have separated me from her interests until I saw her safe again.

“Yet, young Hammond is every inch a man—that he has more than proven to us already by his gallant deed at Capri, when he saved dear Marion’s life at the risk of his own.

“Well, well, I will not reflect upon him. Those who have summoned him home to America have a right to his time, and he is bound to obey them; but still I am a little disappointed to see him depart at such a time.”

The fact was, that Colonel Bray had seen so many fine qualities in the young Amercian, and had also observed so plainly that Marion admired him—almost at first sight—that he had secretly indulged in a little castle-building in his active imagination, wherein he had united, in his anticipations, the lives of these two together.

Perhaps the romantic character of the introduction had produced quite as strong an effect upon the old soldier as it had done upon the minds of the parties themselves. Having been a brave and gallant soldier himself, he worshiped these qualities in others, and in young Hammond he had found a sort of beau ideal of his imagination.

The acuteness of the colonel’s situation at the present moment no doubt made him more selfish than he would otherwise have been, and therefore his disappointment was but natural.

This he would not have acknowledged save to himself, for he was a proud old man at heart.

CHAPTER V.

A STAND UP FIGHT.

Marion Bray, on being separated from her father, found herself carried rapidly up into the hills, by paths, of which she could only now and then catch a glimpse by means of the dim starlight.

For more than five hours the sturdy mountaineers who bore the Sedan chair toiled on, stopping occasionally, but only for a moment, to change positions at the supporting-poles. The two horsemen left the party at a point which seemed to be a regular halting place, and beyond which it would have been impossible for the horses to proceed on account of the rough character of the path.

He who had seemed to be the leader of these men had once come to the small window in the Sedan chair, and had repeated the same assurances to Marion herself which he had given to her father, so that the brave English girl had resolved to make the best of her situation, and await her father's efforts in her behalf.

At last the door of the Sedan chair was opened, and Marion found herself at the entrance of a sort of half-natural, and half-artificially constructed cave, or dwelling, within the side of the mountain, and far up toward its very summit. Here she was shown into a division, isolated from the domestic departments, and where a middle-aged woman of the humbler class attended her.

The cave was quite spacious, and divided into a

general room for the gang, a kitchen, and three or four smaller apartments for various uses. It was into one of these last that Marion had been conducted, and where she found rude accommodations for sleeping. The woman had evidently been instructed as to her duties toward the new prisoner, and performed cheerfully all that she was asked to do, in accordance with those instructions.

"Is this your home?" Marion asked the woman in Italian.

"Yes."

"How long have you been here?"

"For years."

"Have you a husband?"

"Yes; we are steward and stewardess here."

"Who is the captain?"

"Mezzoni."

"Does he live here also?"

The woman shook her head.

To the many questions put to her by Marion she would give some casual answer, but generally she would reply by a shake of the head, especially to any question in any way relating to the band or its leader. It was already the third day since her abduction, and Marion had just received a letter from her father, sent through the secret channel designated by the robbers. She was not surprised to find that it had been opened and read before she received it.

"MY DEAREST CHILD: Under the peculiar circumstances of the case, I cannot write to you as I wish to do, but still seize upon the opportunity designated by your captors to send you a few lines. I feel confidence in the assurance of the leader that no personal harm shall come to you, and that the time designated, viz., six weeks, will be allowed me to ob-

tain the funds required for the ransom. Be of good cheer, my dear girl, and all will yet be well.

“Young Hammond, who has been called to America by a cable telegram, has generously insisted upon my accepting his entire letter of credit toward your ransom, in the sum of two hundred pounds sterling. I think he was sorry to be compelled to leave us at so critical a moment and, indeed, he declared, that but for the summary demand from his father, he should remain to offer such aid as he could command under this trying exigency.

“I would send you some personal necessities in the way of clothing, but this is not permitted, my dear Marion, and I can only urge you to bear up courageously under this temporary trial. I am about to start for England, and shall dispatch the business of collecting the sum required as soon as it can possibly be done.

“God bless and protect you, my dear daughter.

“Affectionately,
MANLIUS BRAY.”

While she was perusing this welcome letter there was quite a commotion heard at the mouth of the cave, indicating a new arrival, and of course so unusual a circumstance attracted her notice. The confinement to which she was subjected did not permit her to see out on the plateau in front of the cave, though the door of her apartment opened very close to the main and only entrance.

The woman coming in at that moment to perform some slight domestic service, Marion asked her the cause of the commotion, but she only got in response the customary shake of the head. This had grown to be very aggravating to the prisoner, but she could not start the woman's tongue by any device. One day she had taken a little golden brooch from her under linen, and tried to bribe the woman to answer some questions she had put to her, but though the servant's eyes glistened with desire for the pretty

article, she did not speak. So Marion finally gave it to her out of pure good will.

The woman, who had been faithful to her trust, realized the motive, and taking Marion's hand kissed it.

The noise which had attracted the prisoner's notice was caused by the bringing in, by the outgoing guard, of a stranger, who was considered to be a suspicious character, and too near the robbers' stronghold to allow him to pass unchallenged. He was a sorry object to behold, however, covered with dirt, and his clothing barely holding together sufficiently to cover his person. He might even in Naples have passed for the prince of beggars.

The straggler's story was soon told. He had escaped from an English man-of-war lying off the coast, and being pursued by a boat's crew had strayed inland to escape from being arrested and returned. An English frigate had been off the coast lately, the man's appearance was nautical, and he had evidently told quite a straight story.

"What can we do with you?" asked he who seemed to be at present in command at the cave.

"Give me food. I am starving!"

"Give him what he desires," said the officer to his men.

Coarse and substantial food was placed before the tottering man. He must have been on the very verge of starvation, judging by the ravenous manner in which he swallowed the nutriment he received from the brigands. As he ate and drank—for they had given him a bottle of country wine—he gradually seemed to straighten up, and to exhibit new strength and fresh life, to look about him with

a bright, clear eye, and gradually to become a man once more.

"A few more hours of hunger," said he at last to those about him, "and I would have beaten my brains out against the rocks to end the misery."

"Very good, but what shall we do with you? Those who have the good or ill fortune to find their way hither, rarely return to the valley," said the leader.

"I don't want to return," said the man with some anxiety of expression. "They'd arrest me, and I should be sent back to the ship."

"That's true. The English Consul is a sharp fellow, and looks after you deserters."

"Haven't you got a gang here?" asked the sailor, looking around him.

"Yes."

"Smugglers?"

"Not exactly."

"No matter. Let me join you?"

"Ha, ha! Well, that's bold," said the leader. "What use could you be to us?"

"I'm strong, and not easily frightened. I'm a good hand at shooting-irons."

"Fair qualities," was the answer; "but we've got them already."

"Have you a man who can stand up before me without a weapon?" said the sailor, rolling back his sleeves, or what was once a sleeve, and showing his muscles.

"Oh, yes."

"I doubt it," said the straggler.

"Here, Vecchio, come out here," said the robber to some one inside the cave. "Here's an English sailor who is suffering for a flogging. Will you try him?"

"Here I am," was the answer.

And a large, shaggy Italian, who answered, came out of the cave with a pipe in his mouth. He must have been over six feet in height and powerfully built. He was an ugly customer at a pinch, any one might have seen, and the straggler eyed him curiously as he made his appearance at the summons. His comrades told him briefly that they had picked up a runaway sailor from an English ship, who had been boasting, since he had got his stomach full, that he could whip anybody, big or small.

"Hold fast there," said the new-comer; "I didn't boast like that, but I don't think you have one among you who can whip me single-handed, without anything but his fists."

At these remarks the man they had called Vecchio regarded the stranger with a look of humorous contempt, and merely said:

"I could pick you to pieces like a chicken."

"Give me a night's rest, and as good a breakfast as I have had dinner, and we will see which is the best man," said the sailor.

"That is fair," said a half-dozen at once.

"Agreed," said Vecchio, who rarely found any one who was willing to stand up before him and be beaten. He was evidently the champion of the gang.

"If I whip him you will let me join you?" asked the sailor of the leader.

"Yes, if you can do it. We can't have too many brave fellows like Vecchio."

"After breakfast to-morrow, then. Now where may I sleep? I am as tired as I was hungry an hour ago."

A comfortable straw bed was assigned to him, and he was left to himself, giving indications in a few

moments of being in a sound sleep. Seamen pick up a smattering of many languages, and especially of the Italian, so that it was difficult to say whether the stranger was English, or what is familiarly termed at sea a *Levanter*, meaning one born anywhere upon the southern coast of Europe but who had been long in the Mediterranean trade. The sailor slept soundly until nearly broad daylight the next morning—about eleven consecutive hours. He must have been wandering a long time to get so worn out physically.

He had gone to the neighboring spring, and had removed at least a portion of the dirt from his face, hands, and arms, and looked all the better for the washing, but it seemed very plain that cleanliness was not a prominent virtue with the half-clad straggler.

He joined at their invitation the score of men who sat down to their coarse breakfast, eating heartily, and swallowing his allowance of country wine. Vecchio sat by his side during the meal, and jested with him as to the whipping he would get after breakfast.

“All right. I’m ready,” said the sailor.

“Say your prayers first,” added Vecchio.

“And make your will,” said another.

“And get measured for your coffin,” said a third.

“He laughs who wins,” said the sailor.

“Well said,” added the leader.

“A ring, a ring,” was the cry.

The banditti then formed a ring about the two men, who, stripped to the waist, prepared to do battle. At the word they advanced to meet each other, the Italian carelessly and boldly, the sailor much more watchful and careful. The stranger was not so tall, nor so heavy as his antagonist—indeed, he

was a smaller man altogether, but yet firm and exceedingly well-built, showing excellent muscle, and where the body had not been exposed to the action of the elements, a fair and white skin.

It would have seemed that the man called Vecchio must win by mere force of superior weight and strength. As we have said, he approached carelessly and struck out at the sailor as though he would crush him with a single blow. But the Italian found his fist warded off without exertion, and he received in return a blow upon his nose—which was a very prominent one—that covered his whole front with blood. This was the first “round,” as they called the encounter, and both men retired for a moment to opposite sides of the ring, while Vecchio’s comrades wiped the blood from his face and chest.

“First blood for the Levanter,” cried several.

Vecchio did not like this exclamation, and at the word came up to meet his antagonist with considerable anger visible in his countenance. This time he rushed at the sailor as though he had been a bull, intending to transfix his adversary with his horns, at the same time striking at his face. The stranger stepped lightly on one side and gave the big Italian a blow on the side of the head that turned him half round, and then threw him flat upon the ground.

“First knock down for the Levanter!” they exclaimed.

Again the men retired to opposite corners for a moment, while Vecchio began to open his eyes in amazement to see one so much smaller than himself, and who could not possibly be so strong as he was, yet absolutely getting the better of him. His comrades, who were equally surprised, commenced to

banter him on the prospect of getting whipped, and the big Italian fairly foamed at the mouth with anger and indignation. He determined to force the fighting, and conquer by his strength brought collectively to bear. He therefore commenced, as they again came together, to pour a shower of blows at his antagonist with great rapidity.

The fight looked very much in earnest now.

To the amazement of all, and more especially of the big fighter himself, these blows were parried with perfect ease by the stranger, who did it with a coolness impossible to describe, his antagonist being by far the most exhausted by this system of attack. The Italian, now half uncovering his face by dropping for an instant his left arm, received at the moment he did so a blow on the mouth, which knocked in two of his front teeth and cut a long gash in his upper lip.

This closed the round, and the two men again retired for a few moments.

"Hurrah for the Levanter!" was the cry.

There was a little malicious satisfaction in these cries on the part of the gang, for there was hardly a man among them over whom Vecchio had not in some way domineered, his great strength preventing retaliation on their part. To see him, therefore, find his match, and even more in one smaller than himself, was a source of secret satisfaction to the majority.

The big Italian now lost his temper entirely, as well as all discretion. He came to the center of the ring this time full of rage, and the stranger saw that he must look out for himself. The Italian rained blows at him so hard and fast that it required all of his agility to defend himself.

"Go it Vecchio."

"Go it, Levanter."

These were the cries that now saluted the men, and the excitement grew stronger every moment.

The sailor was evidently master of the art of boxing, for the stout and valiant Vecchio had not yet been able to give him a blow upon his body anywhere, except the arms, which were used to parry with. On these black and blue spots had begun to appear, showing that the flesh of the sailor was not hardened to a fighting condition.

"Go it, Vecchio!" "Go it, Levanter!" were again the cries; but the fact was the Italian was far too much in earnest, and had lost his reason in the excess of his anger, while the sailor was actually as cool as though engaged at a game of ten-pins.

But such a fight could not be prolonged; it was time to bring it to a close, and watching his chance, the sailor now aimed a blow just back of Vecchio's ear, with a sort of swinging stroke, which instantly knocked the man as senseless as though he had been struck with a crowbar, and he lay upon the ground like one dead.

"Vecchio's down!"

"Vecchio's down!"

This was the cry that was heard on all sides; but when they saw that he did not rise, a more serious aspect took possession of their countenances, and all rushed to the spot where the big Italian was lying.

"You have killed him!" exclaimed one.

"He don't breathe!" said another.

"Poor Vecchio!" said a third.

In the meantime the stranger put his ear to the man's heart and said:

"He'll come round presently."

But it had been a dangerous "hit" given in a bad place, undoubtedly, because the Levanter, as they called him, saw that the man's strength would finally break down his guards, and that he must in self-defense resort to a blow which is only given in desperation by fighting men. The sailor, as we have said, had not received one blow upon his body, and had thus shown the power of science against strength, coolness against headlong and unskilled fighting.

The man Vecchio was carried by his comrades to a spring hard by, and his temples bathed and his head washed, but he did not come round to actual consciousness for several hours, and then he was far too exhausted to stand. His frame, large and powerful as it was, had received a tremendous shock by the blow from his despised adversary.

The robbers, with a sort of instinctive admiration for physical power and skill, frankly praised the stranger, and declared that when the captain came he should become one of the band. As this was exactly what he had requested, all were on the best of terms, the men sitting at their pipes and hearing the sailor's personal history and such sea adventures and stories as he colored to suit their taste. It was a wild scene presented by the open plateau upon which the robbers were seated in a picturesque group. They were swarthy men, all wearing a sort of half-uniform, and with the conventional Italian hat and leggins, both decked with parti-colored ribbons. The men were never without their arms, pistols and dirks, stuck into their broad leather belts, held by a heavy steel buckle in the front of the waist. All wore scarlet kerchiefs about their necks,

and heavy beards, and long hair was the rule among them.

Vecchio presented a sorry sight on the next day, but he was man enough to acknowledge himself fairly beaten. Still he sat on one side, and seemed moody and revengeful over his pipe. His head and face were badly swollen, and his mouth was very sore. The fact was, the fellow had been terribly punished, and his chagrin was equal to his physical suffering.

CHAPTER VI.

THE JAR OF GOLD.

Naples, like Genoa, is full of old palaces, formerly occupied by wealthy and titled families, who have long since passed away, leaving descendants still resident in them, but whose fortunes have very generally dwindled away. The titles and the palaces have been easily handed down, but pecuniary resources have very naturally proved much more ephemeral.

In the Strada Roma, Naples, also known as the Strada Toledo, there are a number of these palatial residences, as pretentious as they were a century since, though the fortune of the present occupant may be, in a pecuniary sense, of the humblest character. Among these palaces was that of the Corrello family, once known as among the leading spirits of the then Kingdom of Naples.

This family had sustained a high position in Italian history—they were loyal, proud, and rich. With the death of the representative of the family, half a century since, the proverbial wealth of the Correllos had also passed away. But there stood the palace as of yore, now occupied only by Alberto Corrello, the sole living representative of a long line of famous statesmen and soldiers, men who had served their country generation after generation.

Time was when the ancestors of Alberto Corrello were held by the people as little lower than the occupants of the throne itself. But, alas! the nobility

of character had seemed to fade out from the family representatives as its pecuniary fortune had done, and Alberto Corrello to-day, in place of holding the position of counselor, scholar, and philosopher, as his great, great grandfather had done, was known better as the famous Neapolitan gamester than for any other individuality.

He was a man of singular habits, often isolating himself for days at a time, and refusing to see even his confidential servant. He cared apparently for neither women nor wine, and so far as his nature was evinced to the outer world, he exhibited but one passion, that of the gamester. One other trait Alberto Corrello had shown, that of cold-blooded vengeance, such as is often seen in the duelist. He had several times been engaged in these personal encounters, in which he had more than once killed his adversary.

Some people accounted for his solitary tastes and frequent retirement from his associates, as resulting from the remorse engendered by these events.

He had no intimates; and it was said that he was too proud to associate thus with the class among whom his habits as a gamester so often brought him. He had early run through with the limited means which he had inherited, and how he managed to sustain his large losses as a gambler was often a source of surprise to those who knew him.

There was, however, a well-authenticated story extant, and which had been tossed about from mouth to mouth among the gossips for years. It was to the effect that one of the Corrello family had left a sealed jar buried in the basement of the palace, and which, with certain conditions, was mentioned in his will. This jar was not to be opened for

three generations, the time expiring, according to the story, just as Alberto came into possession. When it was opened by Alberto it was found to contain untold wealth in the shape of gold and precious stones.

This story was Aladdin-like to a degree, just suited to the taste of the Neapolitan gossips, and so was eagerly seized upon and retailed everywhere.

It was not exactly known who first started this story, but it was universally believed, and when on one occasion Alberto himself had been appealed to as to the truth, or otherwise, of the tale, he said, significantly, that family matters were hardly a fit subject for public discussion, yet he seemed for some reason to take good care not to deny the truth of the story. Indeed, to those who had heard his reply he had conveyed the impression that there was a decided foundation of fact in the report.

And thus fresh impetus was given to the queer story.

In speaking of Alberto Corrello it came to be a frequent thing in Naples, in reference to the story of the jar of gold, to say:

"I wish I had Corrello's jar of gold."

"Now Corrello with his jar of gold might do thus and so."

"If I had Corrello's jar I would help you."

"Go to Corrello with his jar of gold," and similar applications of the idea.

It thus became the universal belief that this representative of the old family had in this store of gold and precious stones a never-failing source to draw upon whenever his purse needed replenishing. That jar was quite as inexhaustible as Fortunatus' purse, and far more tangible, as the aggregated wealth

was in visible mass. And yet, although Naples is full of beggars, and poverty stalks boldly at every corner, somehow the poor did not feel moved to beg at the well-known door of the Corrello palace, and never of its master in person.

Beggars have certainly an unconscious instinct by which they are governed. They rarely solicit of the wrong man. They may not always be successful, but perhaps they may succeed the next time.

Alberto Corrello's air was cold and repulsive, his features dark even for an Italian, while his smooth and carefully shaven face was classic in its severe beauty of outline; his eyes were large and piercing, and his manner self-possessed and assured.

His manner was that of one who had discounted all chances, and who was not to be surprised by whatever might occur. Thus, when his game was watched at the gambling resorts, no one ever detected the least expression of elation or depression while he was winning or losing, and certainly no man played with a more lavish hand than he.

Alberto Corrello had broken more than one private bank in Naples, but he had also lost the gold which he had thus won perhaps within the next twenty-four hours. There were no tell-tale lines in his face; his hand was equally steady whether in staking hundreds or thousands.

"How cool he is!" said one.

"Of course."

"Why of course?"

"Has he not that jar to draw from?"

"Ah, very true."

"We should any of us be indifferent as to our losses if we had unlimited credit at the Banco Nazionale."

"You are right. The jar is his bank."

And thus the golden and inexhaustible jar was being constantly brought to mind.

The Church even had considered the matter, and finally came to believe a story so frequently repeated, and had made bold to solicit a fraction for the use of the religious institutions; but Alberto dismissed these applications so coolly that they were not repeated.

With such a treasure to draw from," said one of the priests, "one would suppose you could afford to give a trifle to the Church."

"What treasure?" asked Alberto, sternly.

"Why, the jar of gold."

"Ah, yes; but even that jar has a bottom."

"One might doubt it."

"How so?" demanded Alberto.

"Judging from your lavishness at the gaming table."

"Hence," said Alberto, pointing to the door.

"Only the guilty are sensitive to reproach," said the priest.

"Your sacred garments and calling alone preserve you from a thrashing," was the reply.

The last representative of the Corrello family was no more solicited in behalf of the Church, although his ancestors had ever been its firm supporters. His glaring inconsistencies were the talk of the gossips; his moods, as variable as the wind, served them as ready themes, and both his gains and losses at play were magnified beyond all reason by the tongue of rumor.

Once or twice, Beppo, the man-servant who attended upon Alberto, was importuned relative to that jar of gold, but he could give no positive infor-

mation. The basement where it was said to be was securely locked, being only accessible by an iron door, and his master kept the key, permitting no one to enter there at any time.

As to the size of the jar, Beppo knew not exactly how he had got the impression, but it was said to stand nearly or quite as high as a man's head, and, when first opened was full to the very brim with gold and precious stones, dug from some royal depository within the ancient walls of Cumæ, that once famous city, the ruins of which are still visited by travelers, about a league from Naples. A city which flourished a thousand years before the advent of Christ upon the earth.

This was by no means a very improbable story, as immense wealth had been gathered from tombs of the ancient Greeks, whose dead were burned and their ashes buried in mural urns, together with a large share of their earthly riches, in the shape of gold and precious stones. Altogether, a mystery hung over Alberto Corrello which the Neapolitans could not fathom.

He was handsome enough to attract the eye of many a lovely, titled lady, and it was known that many such had modestly tried to engage his favors, but Alberto seemed to care for none of them. Belying the temperament of his countrymen generally, he appeared to be of stone rather than of flesh and blood. Wine could not warm him, nor woman attract him; at least, this was what the tongue of public gossip said, and appearances certainly sustained the theory.

"There goes Alberto Corrello," said one young fellow to another, as they stood smoking before the royal palace.

"How stern and cold he looks."

"He has had enough experience to sour him."

"Yes; he has killed three foreigners, as well as young Verdi, in duels. Perhaps his conscience pricks him."

"There were two Frenchmen and an Englishman, eh?"

"Yes."

"What was the trouble?"

"Something at the gaming table."

"Not women, then?"

"No; Corrello wouldn't fight about women; he's too cold-blooded. He doesn't care for them."

"And yet," said his companion, "I have heard that he was once very deeply in love, some dozen years ago, and that, with the exception of his want of property, he was then considered a very desirable and presentable fellow among the other sex. I forget who she was, but folks thought that he was engaged at that time, until, to the general surprise, the parents of the lady broke off the match."

"I had never heard of this."

"It was so."

"How long since?"

"About twelve years."

"He must have outgrown that."

"I was one day where the subject was being discussed," continued the narrator, "when one of the gentlemen attributed the eccentricity of Alberto Corrello to this very fact of his early disappointment in love, saying that he gave promise, as a young man, of being a worthy scion of his once noble family, but suddenly all was changed, on his breaking off from the lady, and from that hour he went to the bad rapidly."

"It may be so."

"I can very well conceive of it, for Corrello is a handsome and sensitive fellow. Since those days he has become hardened, indeed. Do you remember when he fought with young Verdi? That was one of the hardest things ever brought against him, I think. It was a gambling dispute; nothing, one would think, but what the seconds might easily have settled. But no, Corrello insisted upon fighting Verdi, who was almost a boy in years, and a noble-hearted fellow. They fought with pistols, in the usual fashion, and Alberto sent a bullet through the boy's brains."

"I remember that, and how the family mourned over their loss. Public feeling ran hard against Corrello then, and he absented himself for a considerable time from the city. I can conceive of a man going out to fight in resenting a serious insult, but for a mere dispute at cards it is unreasonable."

"Corrello would go out, they say, if you were to drop a pin upon his foot, he is so moody and imperious. Do you know that he has not an intimate friend in all Naples, man nor woman? To be sure, his style is not exactly calculated to invite friends, that is plain, but then we all want some one to lean upon occasionally. That's why I tolerate you, my dear boy."

The subject of this conversation, as he passed, took no heed of any one, or at least he seemed not to do so, and yet his keen, active eyes were all about him, and he was in fact very observant of even the smallest circumstance occurring.

He was plainly but handsomely dressed, of medium height and size, with, as we have before said, a fresh shaven handsome face, almost womanly in its delicacy of outline. He was just such a man as

women would have praised at first sight, for his good looks and aristocratic bearing. There was an imperiousness and hauteur about him, however, that did not invite confidence, as had just been remarked by those who were observing him.

“Wonder if he hasn’t got near the bottom of that jar of gold?” suggested one of the former speakers.

“Do you believe there is any jar?”

“Well, everybody says so.”

“He needs a mine.”

“Some say the jar is inexhaustible.”

“One would think so from the way he lavishes gold at the gaming table,” said the other. “He is declared to be the coolest gamester in Europe.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE DETECTIVE.

In the meantime Colonel Bray had reached home and was in active consultation with his friends.

Even in London, where he was so well known, the old officer found it no easy task to raise the heavy sum required for his child's ransom. All to whom he applied heard his story respectfully, and offered every token of sympathy except the very one which alone would meet the actual necessities of the case—money.

Some insisted upon making a government affair of it, and having a special demand made upon the Italian authorities for the restoration of Marion Bray. A fleet of men-of-war should at once be sent to Naples, etc., etc. Others suggested that the money should be raised and paid over, and then that the Italian government be made to refund the sum. This was a very good idea, and if these advisers would but advance the five thousand pounds sterling, in the meantime, why this course would answer the colonel's purpose. But somehow these people, so very ready and often reasonable with their suggestions, had not the means or inclination to advance the money itself.

Many persons were for organizing a company of resolute men, landing at or near Naples, and marching in a body to the stronghold of the robbers and liberating the English girl. These persons had only to be informed that such a course would cost the life of the prisoner to see that the business of liberation

was not so easily met, except by paying the ransom. Indeed, after looking at the case in every possible light, this was at last conceded to be the only plan to pursue.

Colonel Bray's daughter had been permitted to send him a letter in reply to the one he wrote to her just as he was about to leave Naples, and this had brought comforting assurance to the father, so far as the immediate safety of his child was concerned. The letter ran as follows:

"DEAR FATHER:—I am permitted to say that I have received your kind letter, written just as you were about to start for England. I am made as comfortable as possible here under the circumstances, and have a very respectful and kind peasant woman to wait upon me. I am satisfied that no personal harm is intended or will be permitted in my instance, but also that the payment of the ransom is the only possible means of effecting my release. I hope that you will not worry too much about me, but yet I cannot say how earnestly I desire to be released from this isolation and trying confinement. That Heaven may bless and keep you, my dear father, is the constant prayer of your fond child. MARION."

This letter, after it had passed through the hands of their chief, the brigands forwarded, and it was received, as we have said, by the colonel. He saw at once that his child had not been persuaded to write by the robbers, and prompted to send such words as should harrow up his feelings. He divined from the missive that the banditti felt quite assured in their position, and were content to abide the lapse of the time specified to him at the outset.

The house of Woolf & Co., whose store had been robbed so systematically, as described in our second chapter, was not disposed to sit down patiently under their heavy loss without making a strenuous effort

to recover the value of the goods and bring the guilty parties to justice.

They, like Colonel Bray, had been busily at work, and had brought to Naples an English detective, who was afforded such assistance by the local authorities as he required to properly prosecute the needed search. They have no detective corps in Italy, but a system of police spies, which answers in some degree the same purpose. The professional detective is not, however, recognized in their police organization. The London officer worked at some disadvantage, as he spoke the language but indifferently, though he was afforded all conveniences.

Up to the present time the real mystery of the robbery remained unsolved.

There had, however, been one discovery made, but what bearing it might have eventually in the matter, could not be at present divined. It was found that whoever had conveyed away the valuables on the night of the robbery, had chanced to take, among other articles a small box of white powder, an article used for cleaning silverware. This had evidently been thrown into a canvas bag with other articles, and in such a manner as to spill the powder into the bottom of the bag. Here it had found a small hole through which it had sifted slowly as it was carried along, indicating for some three hundred yards the direction in which the robber or robbers had gone after leaving the store with their booty.

This powder had singularly preserved its identity upon the ground, there having been no rain in the meantime, and extended from the rear entrance of the store along a back lane, running parallel to the Strada Toledo, where it suddenly ceased, as though

the position of the bag had there been changed, or that the person carrying it had sunk into the ground.

This was so plain and manifest a "trail" that the English detective, who was the first one to discover this clew, dwelt constantly upon it. This was to be followed up again and again, until it should suggest the true solution of the problem.

It was argued from this piece of evidence that it was not Mezzoni's band who committed the burglary, for had they been the parties they would naturally have turned, it was thought, in the opposite direction to escape with their booty. In this instance the robbers had evidently gone into the very heart of the city with the goods stolen from Woolf & Co.

This phase being established, as relating to the case, new efforts were instituted, and new theories suggested, but still there was nothing reliable discovered as to the thieves.

One day there appeared at the door of the Corrello palace an old and decrepit woman, bent half double with age, and to whose summons Beppo responded.

"I have lost my parrot," said the old woman, in a shivering voice.

"What is that to me?" said Beppo.

"He has flown into your back garden," whimpered the woman.

"There is no garden to this palace."

"Then he's gone into your back yard. I saw him fly."

"There is no parrot there—go your way," said Beppo, trying to shut the door.

"I would give gold to get my parrot," said the old woman, in broken Italian, while at the same time she held out toward the servant a golden louis.

Beppo's eyes sparkled with the natural avarice of

his class, as he saw the gold, and after a moment of hesitation, he said:

"Give me the gold and you may look for your bird. But be quick about it—we do not admit people here."

The old woman hobbled in and followed Beppo to the rear of the palace.

"You see it's no use," he said.

"He's lost! he's lost!" cried the old woman, looking minutely all about her. The rear yard was narrow, and she kicked about the dirt.

"What are you turning up the dirt for?" asked the servant. "You don't suppose he's buried in the ground, do you?"

"No, no," she answered, but still examining every crack and corner. "He's lost! he's lost!"

"Well, you have looked long enough," said Beppo. "Come, I don't want my master to see you."

"Doesn't he like to have people about?" asked the old woman, in a whining voice.

"No; he'd kill me just as likely as not if he saw you here. Come along, quick."

"I'm coming. I'm coming. Oh, my parrot! I've lost my dear, dear parrot!"

Just as the old woman was making her way out, to the utter dismay of the servant, Alberto Corrello met them face to face, and turning fiercely to Beppo, he said:

"What does this mean?"

"Well, you see, sir——"

"Speak out!"

"The old woman lost her parrot over the rear wall, and has been to find it."

"Have a care how you admit any one here," said his master, in a tone of voice and with an expression

of countenance which the old woman observed set Beppo into a tremor.

The old woman hobbled away, and finally disappeared down the Strada St. Carlo, just opposite the famous theater of that name. Here she entered a house in which lodging-rooms were let, and soon after, if any person had been watching that door, they might have seen issue from thence the person of the English detective, who at once made his way to the shop of Woolf & Co., where he was seen to enter into close conversation with the head of the establishment.

"Are you at leisure?"

"Yes."

"Well, I want to ask you a few questions."

"Very good."

"Who is Alberto Corrello?" asked the detective.

"He is of a noble but decayed family."

"Rich?"

"Hardly that."

"How does he live?"

"How?"

"I mean what supports him."

"Well, it would be hard to say."

"Good habits?"

"On the contrary, very bad."

"Gambles, I suppose?"

"That's the trouble."

"Any stories about him?"

"Yes, there is one rather queer story about him as to his having a jar of gold in his basement, left by one of his ancestors. Out of this jar he is said to replenish his purse when it runs low," said the Jew, with a smile of incredulity.

"Did the gentleman start this story himself?" asked the detective.

"I cannot say."

This closed the detective's conversation relative to Alberto Corrello, and he turned and was just about to go out of the shop when the proprietor came to him and asked, in a low voice:

"Why these questions about Corrello?"

"Merely for information."

"Do you suspect anybody?"

"I suspect everybody; that's my business," replied the officer, as he walked out on the broad square fronting the royal palace, known as the Plaza del Plebiscito. Here, sitting on one of the public benches, he seemed to lose himself in a brown study. So anxious was Colonel Bray to be near his child that, after raising about one-half of the necessary sum for her ransom, he left with some trusty friends to make up the balance, with directions for them to forward it as soon as possible to him at Naples. It seemed to be some consolation to the father to know that he was so many miles nearer to Marion, though he could not see her.

Colonel Bray's case was now well known. Indeed, if he had particularly desired to keep his daughter's abduction secret he would have found it impossible to do so. We know that he was afraid to solicit the services of the government, as one of the conditions of Marion's safety was that her father should make no attempt to forcibly recover his child, and he had so far kept good faith with the brigands. The English detective called upon the colonel, after his arrival, and asked for a description of the brigand chief. The colonel could only describe him as a very dark man, small-featured,

heavy beard, and not large in body, but with a saber wound as it seemed to him under the left eye.

"Ah, yes; I have heard of that mark before," said the officer. "Rather peculiar and easily recognized. Do you pay the ransom, colonel?"

"Of course."



"AH, YES; I HAVE HEARD OF THAT MARK BEFORE."

"You are right," said the officer; "but afterward—vengeance!"

"Hush!" said the colonel. "Just let me get my child, and then we will see what can be done in behalf of justice."

CHAPTER VIII.

A WOMAN'S HONOR.

Within twenty-four hours of the circumstance detailed in the last chapter, Beppo, the man-servant of Alberto Corrello, was summoned to the entrance of his master's palace by a very different person from the old woman with the parrot story, and whose real character was unsuspected.

This time it was a lady, closely veiled, yet showing enough of her face to exhibit its remarkable beauty, who demanded, in decided, but courteous terms, entrance to his master's apartment.

"But, madam, I have no right to admit any one, and my master is not at home," said the servant, dreading to make another mistake.

"I know that he is absent. He will soon be in again. I meet him by appointment."

"He has left no instructions," said Beppo, much puzzled as to what he should do.

"It is all right," responded the lady, crowding past the servant, and quietly directing him to close the door behind her.

"You may cost me my place," said Beppo.

"If I do," she answered, "you shall have a better one," at the same time placing a gold piece in his hand.

There seemed nothing to be done on the part of the servant but to show the stranger to his master's sitting-room, where she seated herself and said she would await Alberto's return. She had thrown back

her vail as she became seated, displaying a face of youth and beauty with an eager and nervous expression, which lighted up her deep black eyes and heightened the rich color of her complexion.

To the servant's announcement that a lady awaited him in his sitting-room, his master replied sternly, upbraiding him for admitting any one, saying:

"This is the second time within twenty-four hours that you have disobeyed my orders. Beware of the third and last time!"

Then turning away from the trembling Beppo, he sought his own apartment. He could not imagine what lady should call on him.

As he entered the room the lady turned her beautiful face upon him, covered with blushes. The astonishment of Alberto Corrello was plainly depicted upon his face—indeed, for a moment, he could not speak for the surprise which mastered him. At last he said, almost in a whisper, as he leaned upon a chair for support:

"Signora Amadeo, what does this mean?"

"Alberto!" she sighed, with downcast eyes and burning cheeks.

"Is it possible that you have run such a risk as this?"

"I would dare anything, Alberto, for you," she said, without lifting her eyes to his face.

"You cannot have been observed—your absence from home is not yet noticed. Hasten, I pray you, hasten away."

"Do you dismiss me thus, Alberto, you for whom I have risked everything in order to obtain this interview."

"Signora, think of the count, of your honor. This is madness."

"Alberto, I love you!"

"Hush! No more," he said, nervously. "You must depart instantly."

"It is too late to turn back now, after such a step as I have taken."

"No one but my servant has seen you, and he does not know your face. Besides," he added, "I control the fellow's tongue."

"Are you made of stone, Alberto Corrello? Have you forgotten those early vows?" she asked, gazing into his face with her luminous eyes.

"Nay, nay, signora, speak not of the past. Let us lose no time. Hasten away, I beg of you. Your secret is safe with me."

"All then is in vain," she sighed, covering her face with her veil.

He took her arm and hurried her down the broad marble stairs to the entrance, and bade her not pause for one instant at the front, but to go with the speed of the wind to her own door, which was near at hand.

Strange fatality!

Just as Alberto opened the door for the signora to depart, he saw distinctly her husband, the Count Amadeo, passing, who regarded him with keen scrutiny, though evidently at the moment not recognizing that the woman just making her exit from the Corrello palace was his own wife!

To the American reader such an intrigue would seem to be almost impossible, but it is the normal condition among a certain class of fashionable French and Italian men and women. The sin of such unfaithfulness is not with them in its commission, but in its discovery. The Signora Amadeo, young, handsome, romantic, was married by her parents to the rich old count whose name she bore, but for

whom she cared not the least in the way of affection. It was useless to disguise the fact. No real domestic tie bound them to each other.

She had been fascinated by the handsome face and person of Alberto Corrello. The stories of his duels, and his extravagance at play, also, to her romantic nature, proved a singular attraction. She remembered, too, that they had been children together, and had whispered love tales into each other's ears; and she remembered also, that but for his presumed poverty in those days he might have been her husband. All these thoughts had been brooded upon until in one mad moment she had adopted a reckless plan to surprise him within his own palace, as we have described.

We will not attempt to analyze the reason of Alberto's coolness toward the Signora Amadeo. So daring a man was not deferred from an intimacy by any such drawback as fear of personal harm, and we may suppose that he was in some degree governed by a lingering sense of honor. Possibly there came before his mind's eye, also, the recollection of that past to which she had referred.

As we shall have occasion to see before the close of the present chapter, this notorious gambler, this degenerate scion of a once noble house, this reckless duelist, was not entirely selfish and without a sense of honor left. He was, let his accumulated sins be what they might, still capable of truly chivalrous conduct. Thus, whatever baseness may control the human instincts at times, there will still remain upon the most abandoned soul the half-effaced image of its Maker.

The Count Amadeo thought that he discovered something very familiar to him in the form and

movement of the lady whom he had just seen quitting the Corrello palace. It was very odd. He therefore kept his eye upon the lady until, to his profound amazement, he saw her, after hastening with all possible speed, finally enter his own doors.

Could it be his wife whom he had thus detected stealing from the gates of that notorious gambler? Was he in his right senses? he asked himself. He had never suspected his wife of disloyalty since, ten years and more ago, he had led her, a mere girl, to the sacred marriage altar. It is true that this marriage, like nine-tenths of those which take place among his class of society, had been one of mutual convenience between her parents and himself, the lady's predilections being quite a secondary consideration in the affair.

She had never pretended to love the count. Indeed, she had scarcely seen him twice when she was informed by her mother of the proposed alliance. She was a woman, and therefore was to be married; she belonged to a titled family, and therefore must marry in her own rank; the family were poor, therefore she must make a rich connection.

This was the whole story.

Count Amadeo rushed after his wife, in a frame of mind which rendered him for the moment quite frantic with rage. He was too much a man of the world, however, to desire any publicity as to his domestic relations. He did not forget, on this trying occasion, that he was comparatively an old man, and that his wife was young enough to be his daughter, a feature which the gossips were always sure to seize upon.

He even paused, excited as he was, to anticipate the scandal which any indiscretion on his part would

be sure to arouse among the busy public, the keenest of which seemed to be, with the count, the possible and usual remark:

"Served him right for marrying a young girl!"

All these thoughts ran in rapid succession through his mind, and led him to enter his house quietly, as though nothing unusual had occurred. He went, however, immediately to his wife's apartment, and broached the subject at once. He could not have remained silent a moment.

"Signora."

"Well, count."

"I saw you but a moment since," he began, "coming from the door of the Corrello Palace."

"Very possibly," she replied, after a moment's pause, "as I have just come from there."

"You own it unblushingly?"

"I do," she answered, boldly; "for the very reason that I have done nothing to blush for."

"Do you dare to assert this?"

"Unhesitatingly."

"Why, signora, I saw that Alberto Corrello let you out of the door himself."

"True, he would protect me from scandal, and so did not call a servant."

"That was very considerate on his part, certainly," sneered the husband.

"I thought so," said the countess, as she quietly drew off her vail and mantle.

The count retired for a moment to his private cabinet, and almost instantly returned, locking the door as he did so; and at the same time taking a pistol from his pocket and cocking it, he said:

"Signora, if you do not speak the truth I will kill you!"

As he spoke he stepped immediately before her. She was a timid woman, and at once was almost frightened out of her senses. What could she do? What excuse offer for her shameful conduct? She had never seen her husband look so fierce and so much in earnest before. His angry words and expression drove all reason out of her mind. She would do anything to purchase her safety for the moment.

"Will you tell me the truth?"

"I will, I will," she almost screamed, and fell upon her knees.

"Are you guilty with that man?"

"As I hope for heaven, no."

"Why were you there then?"

"He enticed me to come, but——" she stammered, and could hardly finish the lie.

"But you did not yield to his allurements. Is that what you would say?"

"It is," she replied; "and in the name of Heaven I swear there is no guilt between us."

"Enough," said the count, replacing the pistol in his pocket. "I believe you."

"And forgive me?"

"For the first step, yes."

"It shall be the last," she said, earnestly, rising from her humble position.

"I will trust so," said the count, deliberately. "But as for that smooth-faced gamester, that duelist, he shall give an account of himself, and be met with the weapon he is so fond of using?"

"You would not fight him?"

"We shall see."

The trembling wife, who had lied so shamefully to

screen herself from the violence and just anger of her husband, was left alone at last.

Now stepped in the inevitable Nemesis, for crime, wrong, and falsehood are sure to entail misery, whether openly denounced or only acknowledged in secret.

The Signora Amaedo despised herself for charging



“AND FORGIVE ME?”

that man with the endeavor to ruin her, or intimating that by some subterfuge he had induced her to visit his palace. The last words of her enraged husband still rung in her ears. She knew only too well that a duel must follow. In the wickedness of her heart she even wondered if in case they should fight,

the count would not be the most likely to fall, and Alberto be spared to her!

But if Alberto were to fall, alas! he whom she now loved, would she not be his murderess? She felt that already she was being fearfully punished for her wickedness. She paced restlessly up and down in the narrow apartment, like a caged wild animal, pausing now and then to wring her hands in nervous agony of mind.

In a splendidly lighted and spacious apartment on the Strada di Chiaja, the same night that the scene just described took place, Alberto Corrello might have been seen at the gaming table, staking his gold with all his accustomed recklessness, winning and losing with apparently the same heedlessness.

It was a gay and profligate scene, of which he was the center, for none played so continuously and heavily as he. Alberto was watched by many curious eyes, but he regarded them not at all, his sole attention being absorbed by the game before him. He would pass hours thus, night after night; it seemed to be his only recreation.

When the game was at its height, the Count Amedeo entered the brilliant hall, and walked at once to the side nearest to Alberto Corrello. Without the least ceremony he touched him upon the shoulder with his hand, and said:

"A word yith you in private."

"In a moment," was the reply.

Alberto staked another sum in gold, lost it, and then turned and said, coolly:

"I am at your service."

"This way," said the count.

The two men sought a private room of the estab-

lishment, and after the door had been closed, the count said:

"I saw my wife leaving you this evening."

"Well?"

"Hurrying secretly from your palace."

"Well?"

"Ay, but it is not well. What did the Signora Amadeo want at your palace?"

"You had better ask the lady."

"I have done so."

"What did she say?"

"She said that you enticed her there to ruin her, but that she finally succeeded in leaving your palace without being dishonored."

As the count said these words he struggled to keep calm, compressing his fingers so fiercely as to nearly drive the nails through the flesh.

"Did the Signora Amadeo say that?" asked the other, firmly, but quietly, while he regarded the count with his keenest look.

"She did."

"Of course the lady could speak naught but the truth," said Alberto, bitterly, though he would not betray the falsehood of the woman who had cast her honor at his feet.

"Can you confirm her oath of innocence?"

"In any way you may suggest," responded Alberto, firmly. "The Signora Amadeo is as innocent as an angel, so far as I am concerned."

"I believe both my wife and you speak truly," said the count. "Now, Alberto Corrello, we must meet and settle this matter at once."

"You have the right to demand this, when and where you please."

"Let it be to-morrow then, at noon, behind the Park of Capodimonte."

"It is well."

The two men then separated, after each had agreed to appoint seconds as their representatives, to arrange the usual details in such encounters.

The count knew very well that Albert Corrello was a famous shot, and therefore that he ran a great risk of losing his life. However, he could not hesitate to take this course under the circumstances of the case. In connection with the code of honor which existed among his class, and under which he had lived from his birth, he would be counted a very poltroon and coward were he to do otherwise.

The whole affair presented, as we have before said, a singular anomaly in the character of Alberto Corrello. He had shrewdly drawn out from the husband the position which his wife took in the matter, and though it condemned himself, his chivalric instinct was quite sufficient to sustain the lady's story and to aver her innocence, sustaining it at the risk of his own life.

We are accustomed to associate such delicacy and manliness—for this it was on his part—with other excellencies of a noble character, in those who exhibit them. But here was a man with but few virtues, yet who would not save himself by telling even the truth at the lady's expense? We should not have been led to believe him capable of such magnanimity, yet who has not, at times, been surprised by just such contradictions in character?

The seconds duly held their meeting and arranged all preliminaries. The weapons pistols, the distance thirty paces, the two principals to turn and fire at the word "three," the count being, one, two, three."

The seconds, even, were not permitted to know the cause of the quarrel, so the lady's honor, in any instance, was carefully preserved.

This last idea was at the suggestion of Alberto, and gladly received by the count, who, as we have seen, was especially sensitive about publicity regarding his domestic affairs.

At the time appointed the two men faced each other in the rear grounds of the Park of Capodimonte. They were draped in black, and each quietly and soberly saluted the other as he took the place assigned to him by the seconds. One of the seconds was selected to give the count by which they were to fire. All being clearly understood, the weapons were now loaded and put into the hands of the combatants.

There was a momentary pause, very solemn and very silent. Then came the words:

"Gentlemen, are you ready?"

"Yes," was the united answer.

Another pause. Then:

"One—two—three!"

At the word "two" Count Amadeo's pistol was heard and Alberto Corrello was seen to start involuntarily, but to instantly compose himself again. Then he quietly uncocked the pistol, which he had not fired, and returned it to his second as he said:

"I have no desire for the count's life."

"I am ready for your fire," said his antagonist, still standing in his place.

"Are you satisfied?" said Alberto.

"I am."

"It is sufficient then," said Alberto.

"Are you wounded?" asked the surgeon, approaching his side. "I saw you start."

“Slightly in the shoulder,” he replied. “Hardly requiring your skill, I think.”

“I must see at all events.”

And at the urgent demand of the physician he took off his coat and showed a flesh wound, but not of a dangerous character, in the left shoulder. This being properly bandaged, he sought his horse near by, and rode back alone to the city.

Signora Amadeo knew by some means of all this, and that Alberto had corroborated her false story in order to screen her honor. With womanly persistency from that hour she hated her husband and loved Alberto all the more earnestly.

CHAPTER IX.

A SPY IN CAMP.

We will return with the reader to the robbers' cave in the mountains where we left Marion Bray impatiently awaiting her deliverance.

This stronghold in the nearly inaccessible hills had been well chosen, for the locality was a hidden mystery to those who did not know the secret paths among the rocks and the volcanic soil which formed the mountains.

The cave, as we have already signified, was formed partly by nature and partly by the hand of man. It was sufficiently spacious to afford various rooms or divisions for domestic purposes, for the storage of such booty as it was desirable to keep there, and also affording safe keeping for the confinement of prisoners held for ransom, as in the case of the English girl.

The stewardess, of whom we have had occasion to speak as waiting upon Marion Bray, had charge of inside matters, and it was surprising to see how very neat and clean every thing was kept. This was so obvious that Marion had more than once complimented the patient and industrious woman. The cave was not floored, all lived upon the stones or earth, as chanced to be the case, and it was all the more difficult to keep them cleanly.

There were a first and second lieutenant in charge of the cave and the men, and the respect paid to their orders and position was a marked feature of

their mutual intercourse. A plain sort of undress uniform was worn by all, and the two officers bore a simple insignia of their rank on their left breasts, besides which, unlike the other men, they wore at all times a short, serviceable sword at the side. They answered every morning at roll-call, and paraded at given hours like a regular military corps.

A heavy rock was so poised that with little exertion it could be thrown across the opening or entrance to the cave, while loop-holes appeared through interstices of the walls, where the garrison could pick off an outside foe without themselves being in danger. The plateau in front of the stronghold had been cleared of rocks and everything that might afford shelter to an attacking party, thus showing that every precaution had been taken.

There were always two men on guard, night and day, one being placed near the entrance to the cave, and another down the only path leading to the plateau, some dozen rods, and at special times still another was added farther down the mountain within hailing distance of the last. There was no drinking or carousing; the men played games, practiced feats of strength, and amused themselves in a quiet, rational manner, when not out on actual service.

Undoubtedly it was owing to the excellent organization of these banditti that they had been enabled for years to defy the government, and to carry on such a successful career of public plunder in Neapolitan territory.

The stranger who had been brought in, and who was found straggling in the hills, he who had so thoroughly beaten Vecchio in the stand-up fight, had made friends with one and all since that day.

The leader of the gang had not yet made his appearance among them, so that the Levanter, as he was called, had not regularly joined the banditti. He entered into all their pastimes, however, and was allowed entire liberty in and about the cave, though he was not permitted to carry any arms about his person.

This showed a little distrust, or at least not entire confidence in the new-comer, but he had not yet been accepted by the captain, which acceptance was a needed indorsement to fit him for full confidence. If the officer in charge had not believed in the honesty of the Levanter, or if he had found any cause to distrust him, his life would at once have been the sacrifice. These people had no court-martial to resort to; their judgment was quick and decisive.

There was no scarcity of guns and pistols in the magazine of the cave, one whole apartment being used as a sort of arsenal, its walls being hung around in a fantastic manner with various kinds of weapons, daggers, long knives, with sheaths, short sabers, ranged in star-shape upon the sides, and plenty of powder and ball. The place could have endured a protracted siege if required.

Marion Bray, as she had written to her father, was made as comfortable as possible under the circumstances, and save the one great wrong of her abduction, she had very little to complain of against the banditti. No great degree of surveillance was deemed to be necessary in her case, for were she to attempt to escape, what could a girl do unaided, in that most desolate and pathless region? Still she was not allowed to leave the cave, and at night was securely locked within her apartment.

One evening, after she had been thus locked in for

the night, she was suddenly startled by hearing her name repeated:

“Marion—under the door!”

On hearing these words she looked down at her feet, and saw a folded bit of paper, which she seized and instantly concealed with jealous care. What could it mean? There was not sufficient light for her to read whatever might be written upon that scrap of paper. Who could have placed it there? She was completely at a loss to arrive at any plausible conjecture. At any rate there must be some friend near her, that was plain enough. It did not seem possible for her to wait for daylight to examine the paper, but she did so, waking up a dozen times in the night, and longing impatiently for the coming of the dawn.

It came at last, for there is an end to the longest night, though it hardly seemed so to the over-anxious girl. As soon as the daylight was sufficient inside her prison she read:

“MARION:—Be of good cheer. Do not be surprised at anything you may see or hear. Be prepared at any and all times for instant flight. Save a little food in your pocket at each meal. I am disguised and carefully watched, so I have to be extremely cautious. Destroy this instantly by chewing it up to a pulp, and secreting it among the crevices in your apartment. Be cautious. W. H.”

Marion's heart seemed to be in her throat—it beat so rapidly as almost to stop her breath. She trembled like a leaf.

“Was it possible?” she asked herself.

The English girl's own feelings told her who was the friend near to her in this critical moment, and yet she was extremely puzzled, for her father had written to her that Walter Hammond had been sud-

denly called home by a cable telegram. But she already knew his handwriting, and though these lines were only penciled, she recognized them at once. She felt a confidence spring up in her bosom. The stout arm that had saved her life amid the waves of the sea on that fearful day of the catastrophe at Capri, was equal to bringing about her deliverance from the banditti.

Pressing her hands nervously upon her heart, she said to herself:

“I will strive to be patient, and to be prepared for whatever may occur, as he directs, and above all to be careful. A word or look might betray him. How can he be here undiscovered by these desperate people?”

The reader has doubtless already penetrated the successful disguise of the Levanter. To deceive those robbers required a skill and patience which Walter Hammond at first found to be very difficult, but favored by good luck, and aided by his own indomitable perseverance, he finally succeeded even better than he had hoped to do. Some *coup de main* was, of course, necessary to interest the brigands in him, otherwise he knew that if they were to tolerate his presence for a day, they would be sure to get rid of him in some way.

Chance aided him in impressing the gang with his prowess as we have seen. His college training in all manner of athletic sports now served him in carrying out the character which he assumed. He had been long enough accustomed to the sea to make his pretended escape from the English man-of-war appear exceedingly probable, and there was not any part of his masquerade which he had not

carefully weighed before adopting it, hence his success with the robbers.

Fearing the bare possibility of betrayal by some unlucky means, he had kept his hazardous purpose a secret even from Colonel Bray, and that cable telegram was answered on the day it was received by a response that he would unavoidably be detained for a period of some weeks. He then wrote a letter to follow, giving some plausible excuse for his delay, which should be quite satisfactory to the family at home.

His arrangements for the dangerous experiment which he had resolved to try, were soon perfected, and at once put in practice.

Assuming the dilapidated dress of a sailor, and taking nothing with him except a couple of American revolvers and a keen dirk-knife, he picked up incidentally such information as he could obtain, without betraying his design, and then dashed boldly into the mountains. Here he wandered on and on enduring for some days great hardship from hunger and want of rest, until one night he got upon a point overlooking the robbers' cave to which his vision was directed by a moving light. He rightly conjectured that he had at last discovered the headquarters of the brigands. He marked the spot carefully, then approached as near as he thought to be safe, and secreting his pistols and knife, together with a small flask of brandy, which he had carefully preserved for special purposes, he lay down and slept until morning.

Then his wish was to be seized by the guard and brought into their quarters as a straggler, all of which had occurred as he designed. He had carried his ingenious plan to so nice an extreme as to

nearly starve himself, and when brought to the cave he had not tasted food for twenty-four hours. All this, of course, added to the plausibility of his story. He had carefully stained his flesh to look like that of one accustomed to great exposure, and had freely added a coat of dirt over all.

His success was complete.

"You are growing fat and hearty," said the lieutenant of the gang to him one day.

"Ah! we were overworked on board ship and half-starved," was the reply.

"And here you have nothing to do, and all day to do it in," laughingly replied the other.

"One mends rapidly in the mountain air; it is better than at sea."

"You were a very sorry sight when you first came in," said the lieutenant.

"Yes, I was nearly starved, and had been lost for days in the mountains."

"You were hungry enough, and ate ten men's rations on that first meal."

The officers and men chatted familiarly with him now. There was no longer any restraint between them. He made himself pleasant company by the stories which he told, and was really a growing favorite.

"Where is your captain?" he asked of the lieutenant, who had just been talking with him.

"He doesn't appear among us unless there is business on hand."

"Mezzoni they call him?"

"Yes."

"Where does he live?"

"No one asks questions about Mezzoni. None know

anything about him. It is not a safe subject to talk about, Levanter."

"One would like to know his captain, especially in so peculiar a service."

"You will never know Mezzoni, even if you were with us for years."

"Queer."

"It is his will, and he knows best. He keeps us all like princes, and whatever he inaugurates always proves a success."

"Are you often so long idle as you have been lately?" asked the Levanter.

"No; we have had a long vacation since we brought that girl yonder to the cave."

"She's to be ransomed?"

"Yes."

"Do their friends always pay?"

"Always."

"Supposing they refuse?"

"We have had one such instance. The grave is just over the hill," was his significant answer. "We made an example of the man for the benefit of the others."

"Was that lately?"

"Four years ago."

"Rather rough," said the Levanter.

"It was necessary."

Of course, Walter Hammond dared not evince the least interest in the case of the English girl, and he had strenuously avoided ever mentioning her name among the gang, or referring in the most distant manner to there being a prisoner at the cave. When the lieutenant referred to her he passed the matter over lightly, and was careful not to dwell upon it. He had thus far succeeded even better than he

would have dared to hope, and he did not propose to mar the consummation of his plans by any indiscretion.

About this time the prisoner received another penciled scrap, thrust under her door in the same manner as before, as follows:

“MARION:—Get by some means a pair of the woman’s bootees and wear them. Say that your shoes pain your feet—say something, but get them. Your slippers are too frail for attempting the rocky paths of these mountains. I am more and more trusted every day. Be ready!

“Destroy this as usual.

W.”

Marion read this over several times, then she destroyed it as she had done before, at once entering into negotiations with her attendant for obtaining a pair of her strong and serviceable laced boots. She realized what this precaution signified, and she felt sure that Walter was quietly biding his time. She determined to be ready to respond at any hour when called upon, night or day. The young girl could hardly say which thought most strongly dwelt in her mind, the devotion and gallantry of the young American or the possibility of escape. She certainly felt that escape would be undesirable without him. Walter Hammond, it must not be supposed, was admitted to the councils of the gang. Such confidence would have been unreasonable at this juncture of his connection with them. He was enabled to observe, however, that something was going on different from usual, and that the men seemed to be preparing for some expedition of more than ordinary importance.

Their arms were carefully inspected, and they were paraded and exercised twice each day, until his curiosity was thoroughly aroused. He dared not

appear curious, however, and would not permit himself to ask any questions relative to these movements. He quietly looked on with assumed indifference at everything he saw.

CHAPTER X.

POISONED!

Count Amadeo's secret, with regard to the cause of his late duel, was well kept, so much that his most intimate friends never for a moment suspected its real importance.

A singular depression seemed to take possession of the count, however, and he grew more sober and taciturn. He had thought in secret very intently upon the duel and its cause, and had been more and more impressed with the remarkable behavior of Alberto Corrello.

"Guilty men do not conduct themselves in that manner," he said to himself.

As to Signora Amadeo, she, too, seemed to be greatly changed of late. She brooded over her disgrace with her husband, though not because she honestly repented of her guilty love for the roue of the Corrello family. She dreamed of him still; indeed her passion, though now more guarded, had taken the form of mania, and was the more dangerous from its smoldering character. She watched him, herself unseen, in a thousand different ways, and said to herself, "Since he has risked his life and has been wounded rather than to expose me, I will unhesitatingly risk all and everything for him." She meant all she declared.

Count Amadeo was over sixty years of age, and

either naturally decaying powers, or the mental trouble this subject had caused him, seemed, as we have intimated, to seriously wear upon him. He grew languid, remained much at home, slept a large portion of the time, two-thirds at least of the twenty-four hours, and in short was plainly a sick man. His physician was called to see him, but beyond a few simple suggestions, recommended nothing, declaring to some of his anxious friends that the count was growing old, and there was no disguising so plain a fact. The physician being more closely questioned said that he thought he would soon be better, and in the meantime he would give him tonics.

Let her infidelity of heart be as earnest as it might, Signora Amadeo seemed to make up for it in her character of nurse, for she permitted no want of her invalid husband, however trifling it might be, to go unsatisfied, devoting many hours of the day and night to his care. She made no parade of this, but simply seemed to be doing the conscientious duty of a devoted wife. The old count himself was manifestly touched by this unusual attention, and the self-abnegation which it entailed. It needed not the hints of his friends to lead him to observe this characteristic of his wife. He was a tender and appreciative husband after all; a gentleman at heart in all things.

The count spoke very kindly to his wife upon all matters, intimated that he had entirely forgiven her for that little piece of youthful indiscretion, as he was pleased to term it, relating to her visit to the Corrello palace, and promised as soon as his own health should be sufficiently improved to consult her wishes more closely in all things. They would go

to Paris, where she had so long desired to pass a season, and she should have her own special carriage, a light and graceful toy which should be imported especially from America for her. He appeared to enjoy laying out plans for her future enjoyment as he lay there invalided.

"You are only too good to me," she would reply, with assumed tenderness.

"Well, my dear, it is because you are so very good to me," he would reply.

And then she would leave him, and putting aside her hypocrisy, would sit gloomily alone, and brood over her passion for Alberto. The days passed rapidly on, and the count grew worse and worse, until his physician began to shake his head and talk about rapid consumption, to intimate that the patient was a very sick man, in short that his symptoms indicated rapid and fatal decay of vital powers. The wife heard this with well-affected sadness, and thought that it was by no means best to tell the count of his true condition unless it might render him fatally nervous.

With this view of the Signora Amadeo concerning her husband, the physician and one of his professional brethren called in for mere form's sake, entirely agreed, and therefore the sick man sank gradually without himself being aware that he was so seriously ill, or so absolutely near to his end. Perhaps the possibility of his sickness proving fatal dawned upon him; if so, however, it must have been so faint as to make little impression. But the old man faded rapidly, day by day, so that there could be no doubt of his real condition. Friends began to look grave.

Finally the physician's sense of professional duty

compelled him to intimate to the count, very gently, that it was always best to be prepared, but still not to look on the dark side. He said that he thought all people who lay sick were more at ease, and more likely to get well, if the mind was contented, and if he (the count) thought of any business arrangements, looking to the possibility of death, which required adjustment, perhaps it would be best to have the matter attended to.

"I am entirely prepared in that respect," said the sick man.

"Ah, that is well," said the doctor. "Not imperative, you know, but safe."

"I have left everything to my good wife here," he continued, and as he said so he stretched out his hand feebly to Signora Amadeo.

"How hot your hands are!" she exclaimed, with a shudder, as he touched her own.

"Yes. I feel as though there was a fire inside of me," he replied.

"He is feverish to-day," said the doctor. "I will leave some cooling drops."

"Please to do so, doctor, and write down the directions as to giving them," said the wife.

"Oh, give them freely, they are innocent and cannot do any harm."

The Signora Amadeo, as she stood there, was the personification of striking womanly beauty. She was tall for one of her sex, her figure superbly rounded, her eyes large, black, and lustrous, and her manner exquisitely graceful. The physician paused for a moment to note her majestic loveliness as she stood beside the sick man's pillow. She might be twenty-eight or nine years of age, not more, and

was, he thought to himself, as perfect a style of female beauty as he had ever seen.

The wife appeared lost for a few moments in a waking dream, from which she was aroused by her husband's voice:

"Did he not leave some cooling drops?" asked the restless invalid.

"Yes."

"Give them to me, my dear, for I feel consumed by inward fever."

"I will in one moment," she replied.

She retired from the sick-room, but soon returned with a vial of colorless liquid, which she dropped in a wine-glass of water, and holding it to his lips bade him drink. He swallowed the potion and sank back quite overcome, even by so slight an exertion. She watched him for a few moments intently. He fell asleep then, murmured in his slumbers, talking unconsciously of his wife. His "tender and kind wife!" A few moments later he opened his eyes, and said:

"More air—I choke."

"I will open the window."

"These drops burn me like fire; can they be really cooling medicine?"

"The doctor said so."

"Ah, well, he knows, of course," sighed the sick man, with parched lips.

"My dear," he said, after a moment more, "good-night. I think I am going to sleep."

"Good-night," she said.

"Will you kiss me?"

She bent over his pillow, quietly, and touched his forehead with her lips.

"Thank you, my dear, good-night!"

The Count Amadeo was dead!

It was the last flicker of the lamp of life. Courteous and tender to the very last, the husband had parted with the companion of his bosom, as he had always done, gently and uncomplainingly.

“Good-night!”

The history of Lucrezia Borgia is no myth in Italian story, and the subtle poisons used in her day are by no means unknown in our own times.

The Signora Amadeo had poisoned the confiding old count, not by one fatal dose, but by piecemeal, little by little, sapping his life away and leaving no trace. She put her ear to his heart, which had ever beat so loyally for her, forgiving her misdeeds and ministering to her pleasure, and listened. She looked up pale but firm. It beat no more.

“Free at last!” she said.

A few hours of hypocrisy on her part, a few conventional ceremonies, and the body lay in its final resting-place, the silent tomb.

The widow of Count Amadeo had punctiliously complied with all that propriety demanded of her, and no one had a reproach to utter, so far as her name was concerned. She was even envied by the fashionable Neapolitan world, though they might not give utterance to such thoughts. Was she not young, beautiful, and very rich. On her part she cared very little what the gossips said of her, she was as much consumed with an inward passion as the count had been by that more tangible but scarcely less fatal poison.

What a sacrifice she had made to the god of her mad idolatry!

She asked herself what she should do next? All

this was but a stepping-stone to her purpose. It was a means, not an end.

She sat down and wrote as follows:

“ALBERTO:—You know that the count is dead. I never loved him, it was the usual marriage of convenience, the curse and necessity of our station in life. The memory of our early association has only slumbered in my heart, it has never been obliterated. I am free now! I know how generously, how nobly you protected my name in that matter which caused the duel.

“If, as I freely told you, I loved you before, how much more dearly must I regard you after such self-sacrifice in my behalf. Laying aside the cold conventionalities of society, why may I not tell you all this, as I should do if I were a man and you were a woman? You are reported to be wealthy by some, others think your fortune quite limited. I have enough for both.

“Did you dismiss me so coldly, actuated by a sense of honor toward your friend, the late Count Amadeo? I know that no sense of fear could move you. All seemed lost to me then—now fortune seems to have once more opened to me the possible gates of happiness. Does disappointment again await me?

“Write to me if only one line.”

There was no need of a signature to this missive. The letter burning with the mad love of the writer told its own story. She read it over before she sealed and addressed it, while her cheeks bore evidence, in a blush, that all sense of delicacy had not yet entirely departed.

“Whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad,” she said, quoting the classic axiom.

“Am I mad? Is it really I who am doing this thing? Has all sense of modesty departed from me? Be that as it may, it is too late to turn back. I can

only go forward now; behind me lies madness," she said, abruptly.

She touched a bell upon her writing desk, and told the servant who answered it to take the note to the palace of Alberto Corrello, and leave it.

"Shall I await an answer?"

"No."

Then covering her face with her hands, she sat back in her chair and recalled with frightful vividness and minuteness the terrible events of the past few weeks, a visible shudder passing over her frame from time to time as she did so.

The countess had said in her letter that the memory of her early associations with Alberto had never been obliterated from her heart, but had only slumbered there. She may have thought this, but when the proud and rich Count Amadeo led her to the altar, she was no unwilling bride. She felt all the pride of rank and station, title and wealth, which she received with the hand of her husband. She had been as much dazzled by these as her parents had been. It had required but little persuasion on their part to lead her to accept the count as her husband. We have said she was a willing bride.

But all such marriages, ill-assorted in point of age, are liable to pall upon the youngest to the compact. As to the count himself, he had truly loved and honored his wife, never having an hour of discord upon any subject, until that fatal one which we have recorded.

It was her own restless spirit which led her to recall the past and her early associations with Alberto. Since those days a fascination had been thrown about her former lover, as we have said, by reason of the many romantic stories told about him.

She sat, as we have seen, with her face covered by her hands and dreamed, as it were, while awake—her great crime ever staring her in the face, and a shadowy vision of her dead husband floating in her morbid imagination.

“There is no turning back now,” she repeated to herself. “It is too late—too late! Ah, is the bitter cup of repentance to be drank so quickly?” she added, with a shudder.

CHAPTER XI.

A BLIGHTED HEART.

We have had no glimpse of the inner life of Alberto Corrello. Let us observe him for a moment as he sat alone in his own apartment reading that singular letter from the Countess Amadeo.

He read the letter more than once, then sat still gazing upon the lines, until finally he started up and walked the room with undisguised emotion. He was now looking far back into the past, and a bitter smile wreathed his handsome lips.

"I had never thought," he said, half aloud, "to recur to this matter again, but I will do so for her sake, and let her know for once, how dearly and fondly she was loved, when I was as innocent as herself and worthy of her!"

We can do no better than to give the reader in full the peculiar letter which he dispatched to Signora Amadeo, in reply to that which she had written to him. It will give a clearer idea of this singular and mysterious man than any description of him by the pen:

"SIGNORA: I need hardly tell you how far back into the past the words of your note have carried me—to the days when you and I were boy and girl together, and lovers! You then commanded all of my tenderest affections—you were to me an idol. I never dared to express to you one-half the power of my love. I was disinclined to do so, because this sentiment had become so extravagant and absorbing in me, that you would have been frightened had I given expression to its earnestness.

“Then came the harsh injunction of your parents. I was poor, their daughter must mend the fortunes of their house by a wealthy alliance. Your husband must be rich. I did then plead with your father, and avowed to him that if he separated us he would render my life a blank. I told him that I would win fortune, that he need have no fear on that score, only let me hope that by and by, when I came to him, and showed that I was worthy of your love, and that I had the necessary means to meet all reasonable wants, he would give me your hand.

“It was useless. His mind was fixed, and at that time I fancied, and I think rightly, that you cared far less for me than I did for you. You were all in all to me then. I had no object in life unconnected with you, and a happy future for us both together. So intimately had this idea interwoven itself with my hopes that it became a part of my very existence. Such love is destined nearly always to disappointment, and rarely escapes a fatal end. So in my instance. It was to me ruin! I could not bear the disappointment that followed. Ambition, self-respect, hope, everything abandoned me.

“Ah, signora, I was innocent then, and really worthy of your love and trust, but despair gradually led me, step by step, to dangerous ways. The downward road is so easy! The backward track so nearly impossible! I became a gambler. Some one passion must root out the other maddening one. Since that day, like Hamlet, I could accuse myself of such deeds that it were better I had never been born. You know what I was. Heaven only knows what I am! There is no room for love in my heart now—that place is usurped by the demon of play.

“ALBERTO.”

He spoke truly in those lines. Twelve years before he had been a worthy representative of the noble house whose name he bore, and of which he was the last scion. He was but nineteen years of age when his heart had been literally broken by the sad disappointment to which his letter referred. There was

every promise of a proud and happy career before him then, and all of his instincts were those of a noble and chivalrous character, but all had been blotted out, and misanthropy took possession of his soul.

The Countess Amadeo sat over his answer to her letter, and, as he had done when he received hers, she read and re-read it until she was nearly blind with tears and disappointment. She was wonderfully beautiful even in those tears—there seemed to be no mood which did not suit her.

“Oh, that he were here at this moment,” she exclaimed. “Is this really to be the end? Is my awful sacrifice for naught? Does Alberto refuse my love at last? He *did* love me. I knew that always, but how deeply he loved I did not know. Ah! it was not until after years of disappointed wedded life that my eyes came to see him in the light which has brought me to this. What care I for his sins and peccadilloes? He cannot be more guilty than I!”

As she talked thus half aloud to herself, she wrung her hands and walked nervously back and forth in her private apartment. Then she sat down and read those lines again until she could have repeated every syllable. Despair was clearly depicted upon her beautiful face, and there glowed a spirit of desperation, now and then, in her eyes that was startling to behold. She pressed her hands upon her heart to still its wild and painful throbbing, but it was in vain; she seemed almost stifled, and gasped for breath.

Suddenly she started to her desk, and said, aloud: “I will see him once more at all events.”

And she scrawled a hasty note, pleading with him

to come to her for a few moments, if for the last time.

"You *must* come," she said.

Alberto hesitated. He had never been inside of the Amadeo palace since her marriage with the count. He had an instinctive dread to meet her alone, but at last he said:

"She has a right to demand a last interview. I will go," and he went at once to meet her.

He was shown, as she had directed, into her private boudoir, and found the countess sitting there as she had been when she dispatched her last hasty summons to him.

"I have come as you desired."

"Oh, Alberto, how can you cast me off?"

"Nay, signora, my letter tells you all."

"It is killing me!"

"Can you not understand how I felt, then, years ago, when desperation filled my heart? Ay, and made me what I am!" he said, gloomily.

"I knew not that you loved me in those days so earnestly."

"True."

"But if I had I could not have averted the fate which was marked out for me."

"True again."

"But now, Alberto," she said, rising and approaching him, "we are free!"

"You are free, but I am bound more closely than as though my wrists were hung with chains."

"I do not understand you."

"My letter was very plain."

"But these cords?"

"Our sins bind us as surely as iron chains," he replied, solemnly.

"Whatever those sins may be, Alberto, they weigh as nothing beside my love."

As she said this she looked pleadingly at him, with her very soul in her eyes, and held out her hands toward him. Strange emotions swelled Alberto's breast for a moment. Both stood thus silent, and both were more visibly moved than at any other



"BUT NOW, ALBERTO, WE ARE FREE!"

period of their intercourse. At last Alberto sighed bitterly and turned to leave her, as he said:

"You only show me, signora, what might have been!"

"What can he mean by being bound by chains so closely?" asked Signora Amadeo of herself, as he thus left her. "Can he be entangled with any

woman? I would put a dagger into her heart without one moment's hesitation if such were the case."

She chafed like a wild beast at the very idea. She was in a dangerous mood now, and capable of any act, however violent.

Alberto Corrello went thoughtfully toward his own residence after leaving Signora Amadeo. His eyes were upon the ground, and he seemed entirely lost within himself or he would otherwise have observed that he had been followed by a man, both on his way from home and now on his return toward it. The stranger had no strong individuality of dress or manner, but seemed to an unobservant person to be merely strolling through the streets with the carelessness of an idler.

A careful observer, however, would have noticed that the man's eyes were never off Alberto Corrello. Just as the latter was about to enter his own door he looked up and caught the eye of this man upon him, and he remembered having seen him once or twice before, at different places, and particularly in one of the gambling hells which he frequented nightly. He did not seem to notice him very carefully, and yet he wondered who the man could be. He was a stranger in Naples and a foreigner he thought by his appearance, as he strolled along.

When Beppo admitted his master, Alberto said to the servant:

"Notice that man just crossing the street yonder. Here, this way."

"I see him, sir."

"Have you seen him before?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where?"

"I have seen him walking up and down before the gates, but I only noticed him as a stranger."

"Walking up and down before the gates!" muttered Alberto to himself. "What is in the wind now?"

Ten minutes afterward the man who had been following Alberto Corrello was run against by a lame beggar, who asked his pardon for the carelessness and took his post hard by to solicit alms of those who passed that way. The stranger swore a good round English oath at the annoyance, for the beggar had put his crutch upon his foot, which must have caused him some pain for a few minutes, as he limped along, visibly lame from the contact.

The lame beggar seemed to pay no attention to the anger of the stranger, though any one near to him might have heard the ragged-looking fellow mutter to himself:

"An Englishman. I thought so."

As the stranger had so lately watched Alberto Corrello, so now the lame beggar slowly followed and watched the stranger, keeping him clearly in sight along the crowded Strada di Roma, until he saw him enter into the Plaza del Plebiscito, and pass from there into the Strada St. Carlo. Here he saw the man, after he had lingered for a few moments gazing at the busy scene exhibited in the grand square, at last enter the shop of Woolf & Co., the Jewish dealers in gold and silver ornaments and precious stones. The lame beggar seemed to have accomplished his purpose, for he now turned away, and soon after disappeared among the crowd who were wending their way toward the National Museum.

As the beggar left the grand square one might have heard him say, significantly:

“I thought so.”

The stranger was the English detective, as the reader will have surmised. He had some theory which he was testing, and he had for several days been shadowing Alberto Corrello.

CHAPTER XII.

A RUNNING FIGHT.

The preparations which Walter Hammond had noticed as being made for some special event by the robbers at the cave were quite significant and not to be mistaken. So at last he was informed that the band would depart in a body on the following afternoon, to be absent two or three days. Two men would be left in care of the stronghold, and the Levanter was told to make himself handy in case there should be any necessity for his services.

"Where is the captain?" asked Walter of the lieutenant, who had just given him this information.

"He will meet us below."

"In the valley?"

"Yes."

"Then I shall not see him."

"Not until our return."

"I want to see Mezzoni."

"Few people say that," answered the other, significantly, as he looked sharply at the Levanter.

This departure of the band was just the occasion which Walter had been waiting for, and it had come in good time, so he at once set himself to work planning the manner in which he should proceed. That night Marion was informed of the circumstances of the case by means of a scrap of paper, thrust as heretofore under her door. She was told to hold herself in readiness at any moment. Walter had taken the first opportunity to get his revolvers and dirk-knife, and to secrete them on his person;

nor did he forget a certain small flask of brandy. He also succeeded in purloining a pocket-compass which he found in the cave, considering the latter as important as his weapons.

He had hard work to suppress his own impatience until the gang should start, but he knew that the least indiscretion would betray him, and so he carefully sustained his well-feigned indifference to the movements about him. Indeed he appeared to be asleep most of that day, and was even joked for his chronic laziness.

It was late in the afternoon when some eighteen men, under the command of the two lieutenants, filed away from the plateau in front of the cave, on their destined excursion. The Levanter was heard to regret that he could not join them, and was told that next time, doubtless, he would be permitted to do so. The cave was thus left with two members of the band and the woman, the Levanter being looked upon as a sort of supernumerary, though able to render important assistance if necessary.

Walter had selected a spare suit of clothes belonging to one of the smallest members of the gang, and had placed it where he could put his hand upon it when wanted in a hurry. This he designed for Marion to wear, for she could make no headway with her long skirts in those rugged mountain paths, besides which the dress would serve partially for a disguise if required. This he had informed her of in the usual way, and told her to lay aside all false delicacy, and when he should throw the clothes into her cell to put them on instantly.

Finally the gang had disappeared, and the coast was comparatively clear for the young American to carry out his well-digested plans for escape.

It was nearly dark when the two robbers, with Walter and the stewardess, sat down to their supper. Walter said, banteringly, as the meal progressed, that when they brought him in they did not search him very closely, for he then had a pocket flask of brandy on his person, and that he had it still. These mountaineers have a passion for brandy, a liquor which they rarely see and seldom taste, so when they heard this they were eager for a draught immediately. The Levanter said that he didn't mind sharing it with them, now their members were so small, but thought that he had the first right, so uncorking the flask he put it to his own lips first, and showed evident signs of relish at the taste of the liquor. With a caution as to moderation he passed it to his next neighbor.

Walter watched them keenly.

The robber who had received the flask from him took two or three hearty swallows, and so did his companion. The woman looked as though she would like to do the same if she were allowed to, and at Walter's suggestion she took a couple of swallows clear, from the flask. There was but very little left when it was handed back to Walter, and he took, or pretended to take, another ample drink.

"Talk about wine, that's the stuff for me," said one of the men.

"Warms you up so," added the other.

"But it bites a little," said the woman, who had, like the others, taken a stiff portion.

"Any left?" asked the robber next to Walter.

"A drop."

"Let's have it."

"Divide it fairly between you two," said Walter.

They swallowed the balance eagerly, while the

young American went on eating a hearty meal, but soon observed his companions nodding their heads, and one declared that the brandy was good, but dused strong. In fifteen minutes after partaking of the liquor the two men and the woman were sound asleep, with their heads upon the table. He made sure of this. The morphine had done its work!

Time was very precious—there was not one moment to lose. Walter now hastened for the suit of clothes, and opening Marion's door, for the first time since her confinement there, he saw the young English girl, and spoke to her. She instantly gave him both her hands, still pausing long enough to assure herself that it was really Walter Hammond under that strange and puzzling disguise. He kissed the hands she had given him, while tears ran down her own cheeks. He said:

“Quick! No ceremony, Marion. I will leave you for a moment. Put these on at once.”

“I will.”

She obeyed like a child, and when Walter came back to her, a few moments afterward, she was dressed and looked like a boy. Stopping an instant to thrust some provisions into his pocket, Walter seized Marion's arm, looked sharply at the sleepers, and together they stole away from the plateau.

A momentary observation was taken, and Walter laid his course by means of the pocket compass, saw that his revolvers were in perfect order, ready for instant use, and gave the dirk-knife to Marion, saying:

“Put this in a handy place about your person, as a last resort, if the worst comes to the worst. Do not shudder; we must be prepared.”

"Frightful thought," she replied, but did as he had directed her.

Even at that critical moment they could not fail to observe the beauty of the night. The moon was at its full, and blazed down on the blackened and volcanic ground in marvelous contrast. Broad day could hardly have been lighter, and to start with, while Walter knew that he was unpursued, this brilliant accompaniment of the heavens was a favorable escort for their purpose.

By the secret paths and cut-offs, known only to the robbers, they could pass over the mountain in one quarter of the time that would be required by strangers to accomplish the same distance. Walter knew this very well, but he also knew that their ignorance of these paths might in one sense prove to be their means of safety, as the pursuers who should start out for them would not know what route to take. If they followed the shortest route to which they were accustomed, they would miss them of course.

The portion of narcotic which had been introduced into the brandy, he felt satisfied would chain the brains of those at the cave until morning, when he expected that the two men would undoubtedly start after them. But by that time he hoped to put a long distance between them and his fair charge.

"We must travel all night, Marion."

"I feel that I can do so," she replied.

"And then if we are not in a safe neighborhood, we must keep hidden during the day."

"That certainly seems to be wise."

"I hope by the middle of the second night, at all events, to place you in safety."

"Oh! Walter," for she had come to call him that,

"I already owe you my life. What a burden of indebtedness have you placed me under."

He took her hand, and pressing it to his lips looked eloquently into her eyes, but said nothing. Surely hearts do not require audible language.

On, on the two young people struggled, and it was a hard struggle, as they followed no beaten path, but went over rocks and down steep declivities until they were both nearly exhausted. At last Walter saw that Marion was ready to fall down with fatigue, so he reluctantly determined to pause for rest. He gathered a pile of moss, leaves, and whatever might serve to furnish a temporary bed, and arranging these in a sheltered nook, he bade her lie down and rest. For himself he selected a spot not far away, and placing his back to a rock, he soon slept, though lightly.

Marion Bray, with all the innocence and confidence of a child, dropped to sleep almost instantly after her severe exercise. This was very necessary in order to enable her to endure the fatigue which was before her. As to her gallant companion, he too was being refreshed, and thus enabled to meet the severe call upon his physical strength.

It was Marion who rose first, and seeking Walter's resting place she accidentally awoke him by treading upon a dried stick, which broke beneath her feet. It was already daylight; so the two ate a few mouthfuls of their provisions, and drank from a clear cold spring of water hard by, then once more resumed their flight, thoroughly refreshed and in excellent spirits.

"Fortune favors us so far, Marion," said her guide, as they pressed forward.

"It does, indeed. I am so thoroughly refreshed; it seems as though I could walk all day."

"You are a brave girl, Marion."

Walter Hammond did not much fear the two men whom he had left behind at the cave, though they were able fellows and trusted ones, or else they would not have been left in charge of the stronghold, and of so valuable a prisoner. Still he thought the chances, as against these two men, were in his favor. True they had rifles while he had only revolvers, but he must not let them take him at long range. So far as pistols would prove effective, he knew that he was a good shot, doubtless much better than they were.

On leaving the cave he had at first selected a good rifle, and the proper ammunition to serve it, but, upon reflection, he realized that it would prove to be a serious impediment to his progress. He had wandered for days among the paths, or rather pathless spots, and felt that his revolvers were all the weapons that he could carry with advantage.

His greatest fear was that these two men might be able to bring back a portion of the gang who had departed, and thus hunt them in numbers. Of course, if this was the case, his chances of escape would be greatly lessened. However, he kept these speculations to himself, and to Marion's questions he only replied that they would hope for the best, and go on as rapidly as possible. The sleeping potion would hold them until sunrise he felt sure, but that hour had already arrived, and the robbers might be able to make as much headway after them in one hour's time as they had accomplished during the first part of the night, before pausing for rest.

All this Walter discussed within his own breast, not aloud.

And so the two cheered each other onward, and were full of hope for the best. Suddenly Walter heard a shout behind them, up among the rocks! They were pursued, and that cry was one of the robbers calling to the other. He hastily drew Marion behind the shelter of a rocky projection, and at the same time hid himself from view.

"The fellows must have come down the mountain like the wind, to have reached us so quickly as this," he said.

"They have come probably by known paths, while we have climbed all the way," said Marion; "that must be the reason."

"Very true."

"Must we stop here?"

"For a few moments."

Walter could see one of the robbers whom he had left in the cave, now examining the rocks in all directions, as he came along, but his companion was not yet in sight.

"I wish I had doubled that dose of morphine, but I did not want to take their lives, if I could help it," said Walter.

The young American was very cool, and was calculating exactly how far his Wesson revolver would prove effective. The robber was now nearing them very fast, when Walter realized that it was time to stop his farther progress. It was still with reluctance that he took deliberate aim and fired.

The robber dropped instantly, at the same time giving a long, peculiar cry to his comrade. This cry he had heard before, and understood its signification to be a call for assistance.

Walter knew that he would not probably be followed again for some time at least, and so he hurried Marion down the rough way once more, turning momentarily to see that the second robber did not draw a "bead" on them with his rifle. The other outlaw must have been at a long distance from his companion, Walter concluded, because he had kept his eye on the spot where the first had fallen, and if he had been joined by his mate would certainly have seen him. He felt sure that he had wounded the robber at whom he had shot, very severely, he fell so instantaneously. There was one only left to pursue them. He could not but feel that he had much rather this man would come on now than have him return for help, though it would give him a moment or two more of respite from attack.

"Are you very weary?" he asked of Marion.

"No. I can go on a long time yet."

"There is only one to pursue us now."

"Oh, Walter, do you think that you killed him?" she asked, with clasped hands. She was a woman, and could not bear the idea.

"I may not have killed him, Marion, but he will follow us no more," was the reply.

"Though I know it is necessary," said the young girl, "yet I cannot reconcile the idea with my feelings for a moment."

"It is natural that you should feel so," said Walter, taking her hand kindly.

"It is so terrible to take human life."

"Except in self-defense."

"True," she said; "after all, it is our lives or theirs, I suppose."

"Exactly the question."

While this conversation was going on Walter had

not been looking about him so carefully as before, and he now heard the sharp report of a rifle, as the ball tore up the earth close by his side. He turned and saw that it was the companion of the fallen robber who had fired at him. He had been considerably in advance of his comrade, and his ball had been sent from a line quite parallel with their course and present position. He was not within reach of Walter's revolver, so it was of no use to fire at him. He doubted if the robber had heard the cry of his mate for help, being so far separated from him.

If this was the case, neither could he have heard the pistol shot which had wounded the other robber, and he might possibly think that Walter was unarmed and be thus drawn upon him without farther precaution. All these thoughts passed through the young American's mind with lightning-like rapidity, and to entice the bandit forward he had at once dropped upon one knee as though his shot had wounded him. The trick deceived the pursuer, who, not even waiting (as he should have done) to reload his rifle, ran in his eagerness toward the fugitive at his best speed.

Permitting him to come within fair range, Walter sprang to his feet, and aiming full and fair at the man, fired, all so rapidly that the robber had not time to present his own pistol, which was thrust conspicuously in his belt. The ball from the fugitive's pistol took effect in the right forearm, so that the outlaw dropped his rifle unable to hold it. Seeing the result of his shot, Walter did not fire a second time, but quickly seizing Marion's arm hurried her away on their course.

"Oh, Walter, did he fall?"

"No, Marion, but he is wounded in a safe place;

he cannot use either rifle or pistol against us for the present."

"That is much better than taking his life," said the breathless girl, as they hurried on.

The last pursuer sounded the peculiar cry for help, like that uttered by his comrade when he fell by Walter's first shot, but his mate, if he heard him at all, was unable to come to his aid, and the fugitives saw the man retreating with his rifle on his left arm; he could not even load much less aim it, wounded as he now was. The robber was evidently intent upon finding his comrade, wherever he might be.

Walter could see the wounded man for some distance still, as he did not seek to avoid exposing himself and Marion now. He knew that for a while at least they were safe, but as the robbers had plenty of allies among the peasants, he felt that the part of his escape the hardest to safely accomplish would doubtless be that at the foot of the mountain when they should approach the level country. Here he would be suspected as having escaped from the cave by any mountaineer whom they might chance to meet. He therefore made a circuitous route which should bring them on the nearest side to Naples, before they should descend much farther toward the plain, and it was very fortunate that he did so, for scarcely had he adopted this purpose and selected a spot for temporary rest, before he saw, far through an opening in the rocks, a couple of rough fellows whom he suspected were bound for the robbers' cave. They passed the two fugitives without discovering them, though they came so near that their conversation was distinctly overheard, and even understood, by Marion and her companion.

It was plain enough to Walter that he must have come by a very direct route, though he had moved so slowly, for these men were going straight over the ground from whence he had just come, and it was reasonable to suppose that they knew the nearest way to the stronghold. It instantly occurred to him that these men would come upon the wounded robbers, and he might soon find that he had them to deal with also. Then he reasoned that these men would think that he must naturally take the shortest and straightest road down the mountain, and would follow in that direction, so that if he turned aside as he had proposed to do, he should perhaps throw them off the scent, at any rate, for a short time. So Walter and Marion bore along the mountain side in a line which did not carry them much nearer to the plain, but on the opposite side, toward the city. Still they did descend gradually as they progressed.

When they should approach the plain a little nearer, as we have said, he expected to have to fight his way; he knew that his greatest risk lay there. He had ten shots left in his revolvers, and made up his mind to slay without mercy, to keep cool, and under whatever exigency, to make every shot tell.

He even instructed Marion to let no one touch her, but if they attempted to do so, to strike them to the heart with the dirk-knife which he had given her. She was a brave-hearted girl, but she could not help asking herself, when he thus charged her, "Could I strike this weapon into a human being?"

They now took an extra period for rest, ate the remainder of their food, and prepared to make the

last stage in their perilous journey, every instant fearing lest they should be captured.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SECRET VAULT.

Armed with a search-warrant, and accompanied by two officers of the local police, the English detective knocked at the door of Alberto Corrello's palace and demanded entrance.

Fortunately for the peaceable transaction of the business which brought them there, the master was absent, a fact which the detective was pleased to know, though he had come prepared to execute his warrant at any cost. At first he led the way to the small court-yard in the rear of the palace, and kicking away a small accumulation of rubbish, there was at once disclosed an iron trap-door, set in a framework and locked securely. It was hidden in the most careless manner, but as no one was admitted to the rear of the establishment, it was doubtless secure enough.

Means were soon found to open this trap-door, and the officials descended a long, narrow stair-way of stone extending under the palace, where they came to a second iron door, much more difficult to open than the first had been, but which finally yielded to their experienced fingers. This second door admitted them into a subterranean room, with a stone floor and heavy walls of the same material. No daylight could enter here. It was low and damp, but the lanterns brought by the party soon discovered, to their astonished eyes, its use.

This underground apartment was the receptacle of

stolen goods, and upon wooden tables here and there were assorted valuables, such as watches, jewelry of various kinds, and precious stones. By private marks, with which he had been made familiar, the detective identified a large amount of the valuables which had been stolen from the store of Woolf & Co., the jewelers, in the Strada St. Carlo. To this fact he especially called the attention of the local police officers, who were with him, and who, now that the game had been successfully run to earth, became suddenly very officious in their conduct and talk.

A careful inventory was at once taken of these various goods, at least, so far as was practicable to do so at a first discovery, and on a brief visit. The amount of accumulations was surprising, the goods from Woolf & Co.'s store forming but a small portion of the whole. Undoubtedly here would be found the key to unlock the mystery of other local burglaries, half-forgotten now. The police could hardly believe that this depository for stolen property could have so long existed under their very eyes, as it were, and still remain a secret. The English detective was willing to let them take any amount of credit for the present discovery. He was not a vain man, but he had his own objects in view.

This vault was in itself a subject of much interest to the detective. It was not a modern structure, but had doubtless been formed at the time of the erection of the palace itself, more than a century ago. At that period such families as the Correllos often had secret dungeons constructed within their walls, not for the purpose of securing valuable treasures, but rather for the confinement of human beings, political prisoners and the like.

As regarded the passage connecting this vault with the outside of the palace, that was evidently of a very modern construction. This passage robbed the vault of all usefulness as a place of confinement, since it would but facilitate the escape of a prisoner, while at the same time it very much enhanced its value as a secret hiding-place for stolen property, since it was not necessary to enter the palace to reach it.

The possession of such a resort was the greatest safeguard possible for a guilty person, for property once placed here was as securely hidden or nearly so, as though it had been deposited at the bottom of the Mediterranean itself. No one would suppose the existence of such a hiding-place beneath the Corrello palace, even if they suspected the honesty of its master.

The pretended old woman, who had lost her parrot, made a more important discovery than she had expected, when she tossed about the rubbish in the rear yard. The moment that trap-door was seen the hunt for the parrot had ceased. Not a bird's nest, but a burglar's nest was the result of the examination.

This subterranean chamber was accessible also by an iron door from the palace above.

During these examinations, Beppo, the man-servant who has several times been spoken of in the course of our story, showed by his honest surprise that he had known nothing of these matters. The trap-door in the rear yard was a source of profound amazement to him. His master's guilt was plain enough to the officers now, but as to Beppo, he could not believe his own senses.

"You have never known of this passage?" asked one of the officers of him.

"Never."

"Your master is a very extravagant person. How did you suppose he raised the means to live thus and support such expenditures?"

"It was none of my business," said Beppo, "and I never thought about it."

"There was a story about a pot of gold," suggested the detective.

"Yes. I have often heard about that," replied Beppo, very honestly.

"Where is your master?"

"He said he was going to Monaco."

"For what?"

"I have heard there is a grand Casino there for gambling, and master, you know, plays."

"Yes, you are right."

"The place is called Monte Carlo," said the detective.

The officers then consulted together for a few moments, and finally, after putting the government seal upon the doors, and leaving one of their number on guard at the palace, they retired to report the case to the proper officials, and await further orders. The English detective, on the way to the government office, called at the store of Woolf & Co. to give his special employers some knowledge of their missing property.

The authorities were ready to attend to so important a matter at once, and the detective was summoned before them without delay.

"How came you first to suspect Alberto Corrello?" asked the leading official.

"The white powder acted as a trail, and stopped at his gates," was the reply.

"Ah, we had heard of that. Who first discovered this 'trail,' as you call it?"

"I first noticed it. After that I followed and watched Alberto Corrello, and found that without any visible means of support, he had unlimited gold."

"A suspicious fact."

"One day I managed to get into his rear yard, on a simple pretext, and as it was the nearest point to where the trail stopped, I examined it."

"And there found the trap-door?"

"Exactly."

"All this is very plain business now, since your ingenuity has worked the matter to its present issue," said the official.

Proper officers were dispatched to the secret vault, and the goods of various kinds were transported to the government rooms, where they were taken proper recognizance of. The palace itself was then searched, especially the apartments immediately occupied by Alberto Corrello himself. Here, in secret closets built within the walls, and so hidden as to require the most careful search to find them, was discovered an elaborate system of disguises, relating to nearly every station in life, and designed to represent either sex.

A great variety of the best weapons were also discovered here—pistols, knives, dirks, and short rifles for horsemen's use, with repeating arms from America and England, of the latest and most effective manufacture. His apartments were a private arsenal in themselves. It seemed almost impossible that one man could have accumulated such a com-

plete cabinet of tools, weapons, false keys and disguises, for the purpose of successful villainy. It must have been the consummation of years.

The man Beppo had at once been taken into custody, not that he was believed in any sense to be guilty of complicity in his master's misdeeds, but partly as a witness and partly that he might not be able by any means to communicate with the absent criminal, and thus enable him to escape the arrest that awaited him on his return to the Corrello palace, now in the hands of the police.

He who had been able to carry on unsuspected the double character which was now manifest, was too shrewd in his villainy to trust any one needlessly. The man Beppo, who had so long acted as a sort of body-servant to Alberto, was a very simple-minded fellow, selected by his master, perhaps, on that very account. He was one who had infinite fear and respect for his master, and would have been the last to suspect him of any unlawful acts. Though he was regular in the last degree in his own habits, the irregularities of his master as to his hours of outgoing and incoming were unheeded by him, or were attributed to his amours and gambling engagements. He had often wondered in a simple and curious way how his master had found exit from and ingress to the palace, as he had chanced to know that he must have done, without calling upon him in his capacity of porter. He now saw very clearly that the trap-door in the yard had been regularly and constantly in use. That it could have existed at all upon the premises, and not be known to a person of the household in his situation, was a fact in itself going far to prove his hopeless stupidity.

Thus it was that the most thorough and elaborate

examination of this man could elicit no evidence against his master.

Alberto Corrello, however, could not have carried on his schemes entirely unassisted. Ingenious and self-reliant as he was, he must have had one or more confederates on whom he could rely. It was clear enough that he was not one to put himself into the hands of others, by the manner in which he had avoided trusting Beppo, but still he could not have accomplished single-handed, it was believed, even the robbing of the jewelers' store in the Strada St. Carlo.

Of course, this was a very important point to decide, and the clerk who had slept in the store on the night of the robbing was re-examined.

This man was seized so suddenly, and on awaking from a sound sleep, that he could hardly say positively whether there was one or two robbers in the store. One only stood over and tied him, telling him that the least movement on his part would cost him his life, and gagging him instantly. There was no conversation loud enough for him to hear one word distinctly, yet he thought at times he heard voices, while he was compelled to lie tied and covered beneath the bed-clothes. The fact was, as is generally the case in such instances, the man's terror at the time almost incapacitated him for the clear exercise of his senses.

He remembered hearing the robber or robbers lock the rear door of the store, as they finally left it.

"Why did you not mention that at your first examination?" he was asked.

"It did not come to my memory until long afterward," he replied.

On Beppo being called for further examination,

the fact was elicited from him, by the ingenious inquiries of the detective, that the story of the pot of gold was really started, years ago, by Alberto himself, and through his servant given to the street gossips. The simple-minded Beppo could not at first have told how the idea originated, but by placing facts in juxtaposition, it became plain enough that the story was ingeniously devised and set afloat as a "blind." It had served exactly the purpose designed. The Neapolitan gossips required something to occupy their tongues when referring to Alberto, and the pot of gold was just the thing. Besides it accounted for the possession of certain means which might otherwise have caused troublesome notice.

Matters were kept as quiet as possible, and the discovery of the secret vault and its contents was said nothing about in public. The police were on the watch for the return of the guilty principal, and therefore avoided publicity until he should be arrested. But they did not rightly judge their man if they supposed that he was not at once informed of all that transpired in his absence. In three hours after Beppo's arrest, Alberto knew that his own guilt had been discovered, and he governed himself accordingly. The officers might have spared themselves their guard over the Corrello palace. The bird had flown.

Equally fruitless was the excursion to Monaco by the police, in hopes to meet the culprit there, at the tables of the Casino, at Monte Carlo. The mention of his proposed visit to that famous gambling hell was a mere blind to cover two or three days' absence in some other direction, which he desired to keep secret. It was found that he had not been at Monaco for a period of months, though he did visit the

Casino at times, and was, indeed, when present, one of its heaviest players.

It was found, after the lapse of three or four days, that the police must look elsewhere for their game, and from certain indications they became convinced that Alberto was informed of all that took place from day to day. It was a subtle and dangerous character which they had unearthed, by means of the secret vault. They realized that when found and brought to bay he would be a dangerous man to finally secure.

"The man who succeeds in arresting him will be promoted," said one officer to another.

"If he lives!" was the answer.

"There is danger in the arrest of any guilty party," continued the first speaker.

"Alberto Corrello will not quietly give up his liberty. He will sell his life dearly."

"All the more credit in the arrest, then," replied the other, who assumed an indifference which he did not really feel.

The importance of the affair had begun to make its impression at headquarters, and the police were on the alert.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DESPERATE ENCOUNTER.

The English detective seemed to be sleepless. He had been cognizant of Signora Amadeo's first visit to Alberto Corrello, and had followed her to her home as closely as the count had done on that notable occasion.

He had known of that hostile meeting of the two men behind the park at Capodimonte, and had indeed witnessed that duel from a secure hiding-place. He could not interfere—he had no right to do so—but he was gaining all possible information concerning a man whom he suspected. He knew that there was some secret tie connecting the countess and Alberto, but what that tie was, of course, he could not divine.

He was perhaps the only person in Naples who thought that the Count Amadeo's death was of a very sudden and suspicious character.

These impressions kept the detective thinking day and night, and kept him also on a double watch. He saw Alberto, as we know, visit the countess on that occasion when she had sent for him after their correspondence. He was very sure that there was some intrigue between them.

“It only carries out the old saying,” said he, “that there is nothing calling for our services that has not a woman somewhere concerned in it.”

The English detective, therefore, after having done all that was possible in securing the goods of

Woolf & Co., for which business he had been brought to the city of Naples, now, on his own account more especially, was watching the movements of the countess. She had been very restless for a day or two, hurrying hither and thither, but making no sign he could take hold of. It was very natural,



LITTLE DID THE LADY KNOW WITH WHAT LYNX-EYES SHE WAS BEING WATCHED.

under the circumstances, that he should connect this nervous activity of the Signora Amadeo with the absence of Alberto, but what her interest was, whether as a confederate, or as anxiety for her lover, he could not satisfy himself.

Little did the lady know with what lynx-eyes she

was being watched, how every movement was scanned and duly weighed.

Whatever the connection might be between Alberto Corrello and the countess, the detective felt instinctively that if he desired to obtain possession of the former he must watch the house of the latter. He was certain, long ago, that Alberto's means of information kept him so informed that he knew his own palace was not a safe place for him to resort to, though he had hard work to convince the local police of this. Still the palace was carefully watched, lest the boldness of the man might bring him back for a special purpose.

Of course, the detective could not watch a party both day and night. He required sleep like other people; so he employed a trusted agent during most of the day, while he secured the necessary modicum of repose, but during the night he was a vigilant, though unsuspected watcher of the Amadeo palace.

It was on the fourth night since the discovery of the secret vault that the detective, while himself sequestered in an opposite building, saw a man, just after midnight, enter the gates and afterward the palace, which he had so long and so patiently watched.

This man seemed to be about the size of Alberto Corrello, but if it was the culprit, he was yet so thoroughly disguised, as to puzzle the experienced and watchful officer. He certainly seemed to be expected, and was admitted immediately. The detective crept near enough to see his face by the bright moonlight. The man wore a slight mustache, too light and thin, the detective thought, to be false; his hair was short, and apparently of an iron gray hue, and his clothes, not of the Neapolitan cut or style, but rather French in appearance. He seemed

to be a little slimmer than Alberto, and yet the detective felt as though it must be he.

He hastened at once to the headquarters of the night police, saw the presiding official, who knew him very well by this time, and after making his errand known, asked for a warrant to enter the Amadeo palace, and also for the assistance of three good men, who could be relied upon in any emergency.

He would not commit himself by saying that the man he had seen enter was Alberto Corrello, but he was willing to take upon himself the risk of an arrest. He had a warrant duly executed for the guilty man, but he had no authority to enter the palace of the late Count Amadeo.

"Though this is somewhat unusual," said the night prefect, "I shall give you the warrant and the men, as you have heretofore shown yourself to be judicious and correct."

"At once?" said the detective.

"Immediately."

"Else our bird may be flown."

"There shall be no delay."

"Let us be off, then."

Three good and tried men were at once detailed to accompany the detective, who, armed with the necessary warrant, soon hastened back to the spot he had just left. On the way he explained his plans to the men, and told them that they had no common rogue to deal with. Their purpose was to arrest, not to kill; if they struck, it must be to disable, not to take life—that was to be spared to the last. There was a handsome reward offered for the arrest of the thief of Woolf & Co.'s store. If this was Alberto Corrello, as he thought, they would divide the reward equally among them.

"Now let there be silence and promptness," he said, as they neared their destination.

While the police are preparing to play their professional part, we may look within the Amadeo palace for a moment, and see how the stranger who entered here was received.

"Signora."

"Alberto!" responded the countess.

"You received my message?"

"Yes; you were expected."

"Do you remember that I told you, signora, I was a criminal?"

"I do."

"And now despise me?"

"I love you the more since you require my aid," she replied.

"It was necessary that I should return for a few hours, and I knew no other asylum."

"It needs no apology; whatever the chance that brings you to me it is welcome."

"Ah, signora, your devotion deserves better return than I can accord."

She gave him her hand, which he pressed to his lips, while at the same moment she exclaimed, stepping one side anxiously:

"Hark!"

"Ay, some one is on the stairs," he said quickly, and feeling for his weapons.

"Here, hide in my chamber."

"Is there nowhere else?" he asked, hesitating in that critical moment to compromise her.

"Quick—quick," she said, thrusting him within the door, and closing it after him.

It was none too soon.

The next moment the door of the ante-room was

opened without ceremony, and she found herself confronted by the officers of the law.

"What does this mean?" she asked, indignantly.

"Signora, we must search your rooms," said the detective.

"By what authority?"

"That of the law."

At the same moment a window was heard to open within the chamber, and the detective springing past the countess, burst open the door, and entered. One officer had been left in front of the palace, on the street, the other two had come up with him. As he entered the chamber he saw the form of a man preparing to leap out of the window. Seizing him by the arm, a struggle at once took place, and the man, now plainly seen to be Alberto, fell into the room, but the detective was under him. The Italian resorting to the national weapon, the dagger, struck at the officer's heart, but fortunately gave him only a severe flesh wound. It was deep enough to disable him for a moment.

All this had taken place so quickly that the other officers had not even entered the room, but coming upon the scene of action now, they discovered Alberto just lowering himself from the window, and at the English detective's order, one of them fired his revolver after him, while the other rushed down stairs to intercept the fugitive when he should make his exit upon the street.

"Are you seriously hurt?" asked the officer who had fired at the retreating man.

"No, no, hasten outside, follow him," said the detective, getting upon his feet.

The countess, in the meantime, hearing the struggle in her chamber, and the report of fire-arms, had

sunk in terror upon the floor, wringing her hands in agony, and having no doubt that Alberto had been shot dead upon the spot.

The window of the countess' chamber was at least fifteen feet from the ground, and opened upon a rear court. Alberto had dropped himself to the hard flagstones or pavement, and turned to fly at the very moment the pistol was fired after him. Chance favored the culprit. He got a ball in his left shoulder, and for a moment was staggered, the next he dashed away, and over a low stone wall which separated the court-yard from a back street. This street was inaccessible from the front of the palace and the pursuers lost time in discovering the fact.

However, by adopting the same means improved by the object of their pursuit, they were soon upon his track, though he was out of sight.

"There is blood here," said one of the officers, as he surmounted the wall.

"He got your ball then," said the detective to the man who had fired from the window.

"Yes; and here's more tracks of blood."

The tracks continued to appear, plain enough to follow by the light of the moon.

A moment more and they came to quite a pool of blood; the culprit had paused here for some reason, and looking carefully about them it became apparent that he had entered a shelter on the side of the street formed by a stone archway. They plunged in after him, the first of the officers receiving a shot which brought him to the ground and caused the others to pause. They were still two to one, but he was a desperate man and they hesitated. They could not see where Alberto really was in the dark.

They raised their companion, who was insensible,

and were carrying him away when the English detective came up, weak from the loss of blood and from pain, but as plucky as a bull-dog. He told them to follow him, and he hastened forward to the stone arch.

Without pausing for a moment he rushed into the entrance of the archway, as he did so stepping suddenly to one side, for he expected to draw the fire of the man who was now at bay. His calculation was correct, for the moment he appeared at the entrance Alberto fired at him, but as he did so the detective's change of position saved him. The shot, as was anticipated, discovered the culprits' position, and the three men were upon him in a minute.

It was an exciting moment.

He was quickly dragged toward the entrance, but another man was disabled by his dagger before he was got there, and the detective also felt that his own strength was rapidly failing him at this crisis. He therefore cocked his revolver and prepared to fire as his last resort, when Alberto making a sudden spring struck down the only unwounded man, leaped over his body, and disappearing down the dark and narrow street was quickly beyond their reach.

"What a devil to handle," said the officer, whose head had been severely cut by his heavy fall upon some projecting stones.

"He fought like a wild cat," said the detective.

"But how are our friends?"

The man who had been wounded by the fugitive's dagger now crept forward covered with blood, but able to walk. Others of the police force having been attracted to the spot by the pistol shots, all were finally got to the police headquarters, though in a

sorry plight. Their story caused great excitement. One of the men had got what would doubtless prove a fatal pistol wound, a second was dangerously stabbed in the side, the detective had a severe flesh wound and was weak from the loss of blood, while the third officer had a bruise from his fall which disabled him.

How seriously the fugitive was hurt they could not tell. They only knew that he had bled profusely, though his strength had by no means deserted him at the very last of the encounter.

"You should have shot the man at the outset," said the impulsive prefect.

"Our warrant was for arrest," said the detective, quietly.

"Very true, and you were to use the necessary means to accomplish it."

"We take life only as the very last resort in my country," was the reply.

"No doubt that is the best as a rule, but I don't like to see my men all disabled."

"He won't escape again," said one or two officers, significantly. "They would shoot him at sight."

The authorities were puzzled, in this condition of affairs, how to proceed in relation to the Countess Amadeo. No guilt was traceable to her. The fact of her harboring Alberto for a brief moment constituted no crime, as he had not up to that time been declared amenable to the law. She had not resisted the officers who entered her house at midnight, and up to the present hour certainly no lady in Naples had a more unsullied fame.

Her position was one which they did not like to assail lightly. Her social grade had been very high, and her late husband had been in the receipt of dis-

tinguished honors from the throne. Of course, the gossips of the town would get hold of her name in connection with the desperate business of the previous night—that could not be avoided. The countess' anxiety as it regarded her personal safety was entirely uncalled for. She might expend all of her sympathy upon her unworthy idol.

CHAPTER XV.

RUNNING THE GANTLET.

The reader will remember that we left Walter Hammond and Marion Bray on the mountain side, just about to perform the most hazardous part of their trying journey.

The two rough-looking men who passed near to them, but who did not see them, and whom Walter feared might fall in with the wounded robbers, were really members of the band who had been engaged in performing some day duty in the neighboring valleys, under the guise of vine-dressers.

They had been for some time absent from the cave, as he had never seen them before, and they were now on their way thither. In a short time after passing the fugitives, these men came upon the two wounded brigands. They were hurriedly informed of the whole affair, and taking the rifles of their invalided companions, they started back, with great confidence, to overtake the fugitives. The change of their course, from a direct descent of the mountain to a more lateral one, was now of great advantage, as Walter had hoped, for the new pursuers were at once thrown off their track, and in half an hour after their start were heard calling to each other far below where the fugitives were, and just in the old line which they had been pursuing.

"How fortunate that we changed our course," said Marion. "You think of every thing."

"Providence is on our side," said Walter, gayly, "but we will 'keep our powder dry.' "

"It will be night soon," continued his companion.
"Then you cannot see your compass."

"The night will be a favorable cover for us, at least, and then we have the north star."

"And that is almost a compass."

"It is."

"The moon will not be up until late."

"About midnight," he answered.

At this juncture they came to a sort of open space, or plateau, upon the mountain side, not unlike that in front of the robbers, and though they paused here but for a single moment, yet it was long enough, unfortunately, for those two men who were below them to get a glimpse of their figures. Walter also saw them distinctly, and knew that he should soon have to fight them. He hurried Marion along, getting among the rocks once more, and did not hear from his pursuers for some time. When he did hear from them again, and learn of their whereabouts, it was so near to him that he instinctively pulled his companion behind a rock, and instantly prepared to take a shot at the nearest man. He did not hurry in taking his aim from his covered position. It was all important that he should not miss. So he was especially cool and careful at this moment. The rough fellows did not know that they were so near the fugitives, and the first intimation was a shot from Walter's revolver, sending a ball through the thigh of one of them, and bringing him to the ground at once. The other man, utterly confused, did not know where the shot came from, and he also, half a minute later, got a ball from Walter's revolver, probably in a vital spot, as he instantly threw up his arms, with a loud cry, and fell upon his face.

Marion saw this, and almost fainted, turning as

white as death, and staggering to the rock for support. She was being fearfully tried.

"Come, let us hasten on our way," said Walter; "time is very precious to us."

"How terrible all this is," whispered the trembling girl.

"Self-defense, Marion," was all he said, almost lifting her away.

"I have but eight charges left," he continued, as he examined his pistols.

On, on they struggled, and the night was nearly come again, but they did not pause for the rest they both so much needed. They were now just in the region where they were liable to meet friends of the banditti at any moment.

"Can you keep on, Marion?"

"I will try," she said.

"It seems cruel to urge you on," he said.

He looked in her face and saw that it was necessary to give her a brief halt, and so he sought the shelter of some rocks, and found a resting place for the foot-weary girl. Walter himself had been taxed to his utmost, for oftentimes he was compelled to assist her over dangerous and abrupt declivities by an exertion of his greatest strength. They were descending the mountain on the opposite side from that by which the ascent had been made, and, as we know, the path followed by them had been many times farther than that pursued by the robbers with the Sedan chair. Indeed, a Sedan chair could not have passed by the way they had come.

Only a brief rest was permitted; they dare not lose a moment of time. Walter knew not how soon the whole band might be notified and sent after them. Every moment of progress was immensely

important to their safety, so they were soon struggling on again.

Now and then little patches of vine-clad slopes began to appear, with occasional olive trees, and spots of rudely cultivated land, among the volcanic soil. Once or twice they came upon some spot near to a habitation, where bright and fragrant flowers had been planted by some woman's hand, showing that a latent appreciation of the beautiful was still extant among some of the rough people who struggled for a precarious living in this half-desolate region.

One or two small cabins, dimly lighted, were now descried and carefully avoided by the fugitives. Doubtless the people in all these humble abodes were in complicity with the brigands, and Walter knew that just here they were running a regular gantlet of dangers. But they kept close as possible, and were silent, except that now and then their feet would loosen a stone, or piece of rock-lava, and set it rolling down the mountain side. Marion clung closely to the arm of her gallant guide.

Suddenly the angry baying of a dog struck upon the watchful senses of the fugitives. He had heard them, and was following in their path with a sure animal instinct. Walter paused for a single moment, thoughtfully, to make up his mind how to meet the on-coming beast.

"Give me the dirk-knife, Marion."

"What for?"

"I cannot spare a shot."

"Must you kill the dog?"

"Yes."

"Can't you frighten him away?"

"Not so easily done. These dogs are dangerous, and not kept for playmates."

"Perhaps he won't see us."

"Oh, yes; he's more dangerous than a man in pursuit," said Walter.

"Why so?"

"His instinct is unwavering, and never at fault. It will lead him straight to us."

"I hear him still coming this way."

"Straight as an arrow."

Walter was correct in his surmise; the dog was already close to them, and was doubtless followed by a pursuing party. Hardly had he seized the dirk-knife and taken off his jacket, which he quickly wound round his left arm, when the dog bounded at him. He was a heavy mongrel, a cross between a wolf hound and a mastiff; his large mouth opening to a most amazing capacity, and showing fangs of deadly power.

Walter was ready for him, and receiving the animal upon his protected arm, with his right he literally ripped open the creature's bowels, from one end of his body to the other, planting the keen dirk blade up to the very handle. All was over with the poor creature; he was almost cut in two, and of course instantly dropped in the agonies of death.

The fugitives were indeed running a gantlet of dangers. They were now coming upon an easier footing, and moved faster.

"It is easier walking here," said Walter, panting just a little from his exertion and excitement in dealing with the dog. "Let us hasten on."

As he did so he cleansed the dirk in the soil at his feet, and returned it to the sheath.

"Take it, Marion," he said, "the weapon has done us faithful service."

They had got but a short distance from the spot

where the dog had attacked them, when they heard probably his master and another man come up to the spot, and also their Italian oaths at the dog's fate. As by the sound of their voices they seemed to retreat, Walter thought it most likely that they had gone back to their cabin to procure fire-arms, designing then to pursue them. But he had seemingly got hardened to the situation now, as, notwithstanding his fatigue, he laughed at the idea of these mountaineers joining in the effort to capture them.

It was a hysterical laugh, however, for tough and hardy as the young Ameircan was, the strain of anxiety on Marion's account, the several encounters, and the great bodily fatigue were beginning to tell seriously upon both body and mind. He had always been a brave and hardy youth, very strong and enduring, but he had never been so severely tried before, as he had been within the last twenty-four hours. His system must have been of iron not to exhibit some symptoms of yielding. He had only to look at the fair young girl by his side, however, to nerve him to any daring for her sake.

"How strange that laugh sounded, Walter," she said, coming closer to his side, and laying her hand gently upon his arm.

"A little nervous, Marion, that is all. You must excuse me."

"Poor Walter," she continued, looking into his eyes, "you have been terribly tried!"

"It is a little rough, I admit," he answered, half-exhausted at last.

"And all for my sake."

"Ah, that's the redeeming feature," said he, brightening up. "You shall see no more weakness, Marion."

"You are only too brave and daring, Walter," she added, nestling to his side like a child.

They now found to their great satisfaction that they were coming down much nearer to the city than they had anticipated, and could see the lights distinctly in the distance. Both felt elated, though they knew that they were by no means out of danger. Every step they advanced brought them, they felt, nearer and nearer to final safety.

"Hark," said Walter, "I hear some one in advance of us, I am confident."

"Yes, a rough and scuffling tread."

"That is just it."

"There, I hear it again."

"It is close ahead."

Now came another trying experience in this gantlet of dangers. A shadow was seen in the path before them, and soon the figure of the man who caused it. Walter thought instantly that he recognized that burly and rough form. Could it be? Yes, it was the brigand Vecchio, with whom he had been engaged in the stand-up fight, and whom he had so thoroughly whipped at the mountain stronghold. The gang must have returned sooner than had been expected, and were probably already dispersed in search of the fugitives.

Both men recognized each other instantly, and both knew that one or the other must now pay the forfeit of his life.

Not a word was spoken by either for more than a minute, during which the two looked each other sternly in the face.

"Do you surrender?" said the brigand.

"Never."

"Then die!" said Vecchio, with a look of hate

upon his face, and firing the pistol square at Walter's breast.

But quick as the robber had been in his movements, he was no more prompt than was the young American, who pulled the trigger of his revolver at the same instant. The men were so near together that the concussion of the two weapons would have been sufficient, or nearly so, to throw them to the ground. At any rate both fell, with this difference, that the bandit did not rise again, while Walter Hammond was on his feet in an instant. He felt the blood trickling down his arm, though he said nothing about it, but hastened past the dying Vecchio, only urging his frightened companion to greater speed.

As he passed the robber's body, the man who had been shot through the breast and lungs, faltered out:

"I believe you are the devil!"

But Walter did not pause to bandy words, saying only to himself, as he pushed forward:

"I have seven shots left."

"This I take to be the outskirts of Resina," said he, a moment later. "If so, and we can hire a conveyance, we may reach Naples by midnight."

Marion's face brightened with hope.

Fortune seemed to favor them entirely, for a few moments later they found a market man, with a light vehicle and a small tub of vegetables, on his way to the city, driving leisurely along, knowing very well that he had ample time to reach his destination before the dawn of day.

The moon was now dazzlingly bright, rendering every object more than distinctly visible.

Walter stopped the man, and told him that it was

important for him and his companion to get to Naples immediately, and that he would give him two golden louis if he would throw out his vegetables and thus make room for them in his cart, and drive at his best speed toward the city. The man looked suspiciously at him for a moment, then said:

"Let me see the gold."

"Here it is."

"That is good money?"

"Yes."

"I will do it."

"One louis when we get to the Porta del Carmine," said Walter, "and the other when we arrive at the Strada St. Carlo."

"Agreed," said the man.

"Let me help you," said Walter.

In five minutes from the time that the fugitives had stopped the market man, his hamper of vegetables was deposited by the road-side, and the parties were spinning over the level way toward the city. Though his hopes rose with every rod of progress, still Walter felt that he was dealing with a foe who knew every foot of the way, and who knew also the best means of intercepting their flight. He was not, therefore, satisfied that he had yet completed the gantlet of danger. He feared that the robbers would have placed one or more men well on to the road to Naples, as a final spot where to intercept them, should they not be taken before reaching it. He was therefore as watchful as ever, and even carried one of his revolvers in his right hand for instant use.

It was already past midnight, and Marion was so entirely worn out with fatigue and excitement that she slept with her head resting on Walter's shoulder

and her form supported by his encircling arm. He had managed to bind a handkerchief over the flesh-wound of his left arm, and it was not particularly painful, though it had been considerably at first.

The market man's horse was fresh, and a very good one, so that they made capital progress over the smooth and well-macadamized road.

The brigands were accustomed to all sorts of contingencies and the proper mode to meet them, and so, as Walter had anticipated, they had actually sent forward one of the band and stationed him as near as practicable upon the road to the city walls, to intercept the fugitives provided they should succeed in reaching that point. So Walter now discovered a man but a short distance in advance of them by the side of the road, whom he felt sure was one of the band. The next moment this man called out:

"Halt, or I fire!"

"I will," exclaimed the terrified driver, preparing to stop his horse.

"If you do I will shoot you," said Walter to the market man, showing him a pistol.

At the same moment, possessing himself of the whip, he struck the horse several sharp and rapid blows. The animal sprang forward with high spirits into a swift gait, just as a pistol ball whistled by the ears of the fugitives.

The brigand who had been posted at this spot was only armed with pistols—he had no rifle—and Walter knew that they could almost instantly get out of range of that weapon. The driver also was nothing loth to put all possible space between himself and the danger behind.

Another shot followed, but as it was fired while the robber was running, it flew wide of the aim he had

taken. Walter glanced behind them for a moment, undecided whether he should answer the shot, but he saw that they were gradually dropping their pursuer, and thought that it was not necessary, though he still held his trusty revolver ready in his hand for instant service.

Every stride of their spirited little horse brought them nearer and nearer to Naples.

During the last attack, Marion, who had thus far held her courage with wonderful strength of will, had at last fainted. It was the first time she had shown extreme physical weakness since they left the cave in the mountain. At first, Walter Hammond was startled by the idea that she was wounded; but her unconsciousness lasted for a moment only, and she soon revived, clinging to him with child-like trust.

"Rouse up, dear Marion, rouse up, we are just at the entrance to Naples."

"Thank Heaven," she whispered.

"You are not hurt?"

"Oh, no, only exhausted."

"No wonder—no wonder," said her companion, still supporting her with his arm.

"How kind you are, Walter."

He reached over her, and for the first time pressed his lips to her forehead. She did not rebuke him! Did she not owe him life itself?

The stout little horse bore them in by the Porta del Carmine, and the driver received his first piece of gold. Ten minutes later they stopped before the police station, in the Strada St. Carlo, and were safe. The driver received his second louis, and an extra one to console him for his fright on the way.

They had successfully run the gantlet.

CHAPTER XVI.

ESCAPE FROM PRISON.

The profession of a detective leads him to become, if he is true to his instincts, a lover of justice. The man who had been brought from Scotland Yard, London, to act in this capacity, in the interest of Woolf & Co., was well known for his marvelous skill and determination of purpose, and an underlying love for the punishment of crime. As has already been intimated, he more than suspected foul play on the part of the Countess Amadeo, as regarded the sudden illness and death of her husband so soon after the duel with Alberto Corrello. He had successfully consummated the principal object of his visit to the Neapolitan capital, but still he did not like to leave before Alberto should be arrested. Indeed there was another purpose also which he had in view, but he did not wish to say anything about that at the present time.

Being thus situated, the detective determined to "work up" the case of the countess as she was so intimately connected with the men whom he had denounced. He, therefore, put himself in communication with the authorities upon the subject, and as the matter was one growing out of his legitimate business, they concluded to let him take his own course in the affair, and to afford him all the requisite authority to legalize his acts.

This again opened the field to the English officer, and gave him a fresh start.

The detective had a double object in pursuing this

mystery; first a pure love of justice and attachment to his peculiar calling, and secondly, he hoped that he might in some way, through the countess, once more get upon the track of Alberto Corrello to whom he felt that he owed a small debt for the wound in his side. This memento of the daring and most desperate man, had been just troublesome enough to keep the cause of it pretty constantly in the officer's mind.

The English detective now visited the palace of the Amadeo family in a very quiet manner, and in his own persuasive way, requested and secured an interview with the signora. Of course this was not willingly granted, but finally conceded, as it were, upon compulsion. The countess was a singular combination of courage and cowardice, of pride and humility.

Guilt had rendered her very timid just now, and the detective read this in her face the instant they met. Indeed the signora did not know but that he had come upon the matter of her husband's death to arrest her, and it was this suspicion that caused her expression of fear. The detective was very quiet and undemonstrative.

"Signora," he said, "you have received a communication from Alberto Corrello since his escape."

"You say so."

"Of course you know where he is."

"I do not."

"You are quite sure?"

"I do not know where he is, and if I did I would not tell you," she answered, stoutly.

"Possibly," said the officer.

He had not known, but had suspected, that she had

heard from Alberto. His suspicions were now confirmed. He now changed the subject.

"There is one other matter of which I would speak to you," he said, looking her full in the face.

"Well?"

"You have in your private cabinet, at this moment, a vial of poison."

"What do you say?" exclaimed the countess, rising to her feet in surprise.

"A vial of poison," repeated the detective, with perfect composure.

"Who says so?"

"I have just said it, signora."

"It is false."

"Falsehood is useless."

"I have no poison."

"We will look for it together," he continued, as he rose quietly and proceeded toward her chamber, where that severe struggle with Alberto had taken place.

"You have no right in my apartments," she said, hastening after him. "I will ring for my people."

"As you please. But I thought we might arrange this matter between ourselves without any unpleasant publicity. Servants will talk."

She hesitated.

"I will thank you to observe this warrant," said the detective, showing his authority.

"There is a conspiracy against me—a conspiracy," she repeated, wringing her hands.

"Oh, no, signora. Let us make this business as quiet as possible."

"What shall I do?"

"Give me the vial."

"No!"

"I must have it."

He walked toward the chamber, followed by the countess, who, hurrying past him, put her back against a cabinet in one corner of the room, thus at once exposing the very locality which the detective sought.



"OH, NO, SIGNORA. LET US MAKE THIS BUSINESS AS QUIET AS POSSIBLE."

"I have hit the nail upon the head," said he to himself; "it was a flier, but it was to the mark."

Walking up to the countess, as she stood there before the cabinet, he said:

"You are too much of a lady not to know how much better it is to do these unpleasant things

quietly, than to add unnecessary publicity to them by resistance. Please hand me the key."

As he made this demand he looked her full in the eyes, and to his surprise she complied doggedly.

"Thank you," said the detective.

He then proceeded at once to open the cabinet, where, after a few moments' examination, he discovered a vial of colorless liquid, about one-third full, without any label upon it, but with a black cross mark, made evidently with pen and ink upon the cork. At this moment the countess, suddenly awakening, as if from a dream, and apparently realizing the damning character of this evidence of her guilt, attempted to seize it from the hand of the officer, but he promptly disposed of it in his breast pocket.

"How much of this article, signora, did it require to kill the count?" asked the detective with the most perfect coolness.

"The count, the count," she echoed, as she now staggered to a chair for support.

"Yes, signora."

"I said there was a conspiracy to——"

"Not at all. You will give me the information and thus avoid publicity."

"No publicity, no publicity," she repeated.

"We will keep all quiet."

"Quiet," she again echoed.

"Was the count cruel to you, signora, that made you poison him?"

"Poison him," she said, as though she were in a sort of trance.

The detective was puzzled. Was she already deranged? She seemed to make no effort at evasion

now. She acted as though she were talking in her sleep.

"Where is Alberto?" she asked, suddenly, thinking she might unconsciously betray his secret.

"Ha! Alberto, where is he?" she repeated. "Alberto, where is Alberto?"

"Where did you get this poison, signora?" continued the detective.

"Poison!" she echoed.

The officer saw that she was in a hysterical condition, and it was useless to interrogate her further. So he summoned a servant, told her that her mistress was not well, and left the palace for the office of the prefect of police. Here he gave the information which he had gained, and the vial of poison was handed to a chemist to be analyzed. Steps were also taken to have the body of the late Count Amadeo exhumed, and an autopsy was ordered to be made.

It did not require long to substantiate the fact of poisoning, with the means already at hand, and on the following day the Countess Amadeo was arrested and conducted to prison.

The tongues of the Neapolitan gossips were now very busy; the present certainly seemed to be a harvest time with them, and wonder upon wonder, and marvel upon marvel were daily being brought to the light. Here was Alberto Corrello turning out to be a burglar, and the Countess Amadeo a murderess. What next was to astonish the public of Naples?

Little was now talked of but the absent Alberto and the imprisoned countess. The police believed that the wounded man must be secreted somewhere in the city, and a systematic search was in progress, though from prudential motives it was, of course, kept as secret as possible.

Now that the law officers had the evidence of guilt in their possession relating to the death of the Count Amadeo, they only wondered that so clear a case had not excited suspicion instantly among all those interested in the deceased. The whole was as clear and plain as the light of day; even a trial in court would be a mere formality. The local papers detailed the case, announcing the whole by a sensational heading thus:

“Have we a Lucrezia Borgia among us?” and expressing unlimited wonder as to the possible motive for the commission of the diabolical act.

The case of Alberto Corrello was also wrought up to the highest point of romantic interest by the press writers. His guilt was made plain to be sure, but a halo of romance was thrown over all that would lead one to half sympathize with the culprit. The fact really was, however, that beyond the one chivalrous and disinterested act of shielding the countess from her husband, and which the public knew nothing about, Alberto was actuated by no noble instincts, and was no more nor less than a thief and burglar whose career had been one of successful crime for a series of years, incited principally by an all-absorbing passion for gambling.

It was after the countess had been incarcerated a couple of days that the sentry on duty at the outer portal of the prison suddenly found himself garroted, gagged and tied before he could utter an alarm. This was about two o'clock in the morning. Not a word was spoken, but a man with a drawn dagger was left to watch the sentinel, while six others entered the prison. Here a second guard was overcome in a similar manner, after which the leader of the party proceeded with keys, secured on

the spot from the jailer, who had been surprised in bed, to a certain cell, and in five minutes the countess was outside of the building, mounted on an easy but swift horse, and the party rode away at full speed.

Not until the guards were relieved, an hour later, was the escape discovered, when the men were untied and the gags taken from their mouths, while the jailer was released from a similar condition. Complicity was not charged upon these delinquents, but stupidity and neglect were, for which they were punished. It would seem almost incredible that such an act could be performed, yet these were the facts. The authorities had no means of knowing of a certain golden fee which had made all comparatively easy.

Here was a fresh theme for the gossips, and more rewards were offered for the arrest of the guilty parties.

CHAPTER XVII.

A HERO AND HEROINE.

Colonel Manlius Bray had suffered intolerable anxiety during the necessary delay between his return to Naples and the receipt of the funds to enable him to pay for the release of his daughter from captivity. Though he had faith in the robber's word, still in his nervous and very natural anxiety he imagined all sorts of troubles as being the hourly experience of his child.

His astonishment cannot be adequately described when he was awakened from sleep, on that morning before daylight, and beheld both his daughter and Walter Hammond. They had come directly from the police station, in the Strada St. Carlo, where the market man had left them. Walter had taken the precaution to stop first at the police headquarters to give information of their escape and to suggest the possibility of pursuit, even within the city itself, so bold were these brigands.

The two fugitives presented a singular appearance when the colonel first looked upon them, and he rubbed his eyes again and again, scarcely believing that he was actually awake. His daughter was in male attire, and so travel-stained and soiled as to be scarcely recognizable, while her companion, who naturally had a heavy beard, had been unshaven for weeks, looking more like an escaped convict than a gentleman. Until this very moment the father had thought that Walter was gone to America, which also added greatly to the mystery of the whole affair.

However, here was his dear Marion, so long lost, alive and well, though haggard with fatigue.

"Escaped and well; that is enough for the present," said the excited father. "Now, Marion, your room has been kept for you, just as you left it on that sad day; go and rest and refresh yourself, and," continued the colonel, "get rid of these shocking clothes."

"I intend to keep these always," she said; "they have indeed served me faithfully."

"So you shall, my dear, so you shall," said the colonel, kissing her fondly.

"But, father, we owe everything to Walter; it is the second time he has rescued me."

"At the risk of his own life, too," said the old soldier, grasping Walter's hand.

"How about that ransom, colonel?" asked the young American, smiling.

"It was to be ready this very week, after a world of trouble."

"We are in time to save that little sum," said Walter.

"Ample."

"That is some satisfaction," he continued, "though, do me the justice to believe, that the dread of your daughter's being in those villains' hands for so long a time, entirely unprotected, was what drove me to the mountains."

"I know it," said the colonel, while Marion took Walter's hand and held it tenderly. "But no more now. I will not ask you one single question until you have slept and entirely recovered yourselves."

"Good-night, father," said Marion, as he embraced her affectionately.

"Good-night, Walter," she said, putting both of her hands in his.

"Good-night, dear Marion," he said, looking fondly into her loving eyes.

It was not until the expiration of nearly twenty-four hours that the two fugitives awoke from their long and refreshing sleep, when it seemed almost impossible for them to appease their ravenous appetites. The bath and fresh clothes changed them so entirely that it was difficult to believe them the same individuals who stood together before the colonel so lately. Marion, when she met Walter, clothed as she now was in her appropriate costume, blushed at the memory of the figure she must have presented, far more than she had done when she was dressed in that robber's suit.

As to Walter, could this handsome and neatly-dressed young fellow, now pressing her hand so fondly, be the rough-and-ready sailor who had so successfully fought their way down the mountain side, and conducted the English girl in safety from her fearful bondage to the brigands?

Marion Bray, notwithstanding the hardships she had endured, was the picture of health and beauty. Her complexion was a little browned, but as Walter carefully noticed, the color was fresh and clear, and her expression bright and happy.

The colonel listened to the startling details of his child's escape from the banditti, the story sounding more like a romance than like facts, yet it was literal.

"These robbers have received a bitter lesson at your hands," he said to Walter.

And so it proved, for, as was afterward known, one of the first two pursuers, who had partaken of

the sleeping draught, died of his wound before he reached the cave, while the fore-arm of the other was shattered and useless for life. Of the second two, who took up the pursuit, one was seriously wounded in the thigh and lamed for life, while the other, whom Marion saw throw up his hands and fall on his face, was shot through the heart.

The bully of the gang, Vecchio, did not live to tell the story of his encounter with the young American. Three of the robbers thus lost their lives, and two were maimed for life. The severest check they had met with for years, and all through the cool courage of one man.

"What was your most trying exigency?" asked the colonel of Walter.

"It was where, I presume, you would least think," he replied.

"And that was?"

"With the dog."

"How so?"

"I had never used a knife upon a living thing, and it quite unnerved me for a moment."

"No wonder," said the colonel.

"I have been accustomed to the use of a pistol, but not the knife!"

"Your training has served you well."

"Oh, father, it was horrible, though, to see those men fall when Walter fired," said Marion.

"It was in self-defense, my child."

No secret was made of the deliverance of the English lady from the brigands' cave, and the papers made quite a hero and heroine of the two, giving to Walter Hammond the credit which was so justly his due, for the very trying and well-managed escape from the banditti.

The English detective was one of the first to call upon Walter, after the announcement of his escape, seeking various and minute information of him relating to the outlaws, and the cave they inhabited, besides freely expressing his admiration of his bravery and skill. At his solicitation Walter wrote out some minutes of localities and the topographical character of the mountain.

"Did you ever see Mezzoni?" asked the detective.

"Never."

"I can find no one who has."

"Nor I," said Walter, "that is, I could get no description of him."

"He's a myth with nearly every one."

"I begin to doubt if there be any Mezzoni."

"I do not," said the detective. "The organization of those brigands is too complete to be the work of any of those common banditti. There is a mystery about the matter that I should like to see unraveled."

"Mezzoni did not come to the cave while I was there."

"You have taught them a bitter lesson."

"I was too handy with the pistol to suit them."

"No doubt of that."

"I have telegraphed to stop the forwarding of those funds," said Colonel Bray to the young American, "and now I have a proposition to make to you."

"What is it, colonel?"

"Come with us to England."

"I shall be delighted to do so."

"At once?"

"Yes," replied Walter, "if the authorities have done with me. But you know that they notified me

to give them information of my proposed departure.”

“Yes, as a witness.”

“I presume so.”

“Won’t an affidavit answer?”

“I will see.”

“Ho! for merry England,” said Marion, delighted.

While this conversation was taking place, or rather at the moment of its close, Walter received a summons to the government office signed by the prefect, to which he at once responded.

Arriving in the Strada St. Carlo he was shown the body of a man who had been found murdered upon the road just this side of Resina, and which he was able to recognize as the market man who drove them to Naples.

This was a part of the brigands’ pitiful revenge. But beside that body lay another which had been found by the vine-dressers of the hills. It was the mortal remains of Vecchio. Walter’s affidavit relating to these bodies was duly taken.

He could not but mark the different expressions of the two faces, as they lay there in death. That of the market man, though he doubtless suffered severe pain before the last breath, yet looked calm and peaceful, almost child-like. Vecchio’s features, on the contrary, were distorted, an evident frown being noticeable on the brow, while the lower features were drawn and rigid.

The bullet from Walter’s revolver had passed quite through his body, just below the heart. The market man had been stabbed in the back by a dirk, doubtless the cowardly perpetrator of the deed coming up unobserved from behind.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MEZZONI UNMASKED.

In introducing real personages and actual events, an author feels some delicacy as to giving names; and it should be so. Still the well known visit of Mr. Bush, of Scotland Yard, London, to Naples in 1871, and the complete success with which he crowned that remarkable experience, need give no cause for reticence in relation to his name. That famous officer and detective has too widespread a distinction in his arduous profession not to be known among the police of all nations.

The famous discovery of the secret vault, and the prompt recovery of nearly the whole of the property stolen from the store of Woolf & Co., in the Strada St. Carlo, were solely due to his personal skill and perseverance, and would alone have made the reputation of any detective. Highly accredited, he was received by the local authorities with kindness and respect, and afforded facilities which had never before been accorded to any foreigner by the Neapolitans. No spirit of jealousy was permitted to interfere in the least with his operations, and he met with no opposition from any source on that score.

In his report to the home department, Mr. Bush especially referred to these agreeable facts.

Partly in recognition of this courtesy, and also for reasons which will ultimately appear, Mr. Bush held a consultation with the heads of the local police of the city, and proposed to lead an expedition which should break up the headquarters of the famous

brigands who were under the leadership of Mezzoni.

He had obtained such elaborate information from Walter Hammond as to make him very confident of success; such knowledge had never before been in the possession of the authorities, and he had great faith that, with a proper co-operation, he could ferret out this national pest and possibly secure the person of the leading bravo himself.

To accomplish this he demanded ample assistance, and the control of the movement, so far as it could be properly delegated to him.

He was especially encouraged by the manner in which his proposal was received, and it was with very little delay that he was finally informed that the authorities would accede to his desires. He was to perfect his plans at once, and after laying them before the department he would be given such aid as he required to carry them out successfully. This he anticipated, as he had been met in a similar spirit at all points.

The detective had such confidence in the young American that he tried in all manner of ways to induce him to accompany the expedition to the robbers' stronghold. But the fact was that Walter Hammond had no object to subserve that would compensate for the risk which he would encounter by complying with the detective's wish.

"I had rather have you with me than a dozen Neapolitan soldiers," said the detective.

"Too much to risk without an object," was the reply. "These villains know me now."

"You have given them serious reason."

"Just so; and I should be a target, therefore, for their best marksmen," said Walter.

"Perhaps you are right. They would be very apt, if we came to a fight, to single you out."

"I know I am right; revenge is one of their cardinal principles," he replied.

"I have great confidence of success with these items of information you have supplied."

"Take plenty of men with you."

"I shall."

"And be sure of one thing," said Walter, seriously; "you must give no quarter. These men are as treacherous as our American Indians."

"I fear that mercy is thrown away upon such scoundrels. They fight us, as it were, with halts about their necks, and are desperate men."

"They will show you and your party no mercy, you may depend upon that."

"True, the risk is considerable," said the detective, "but you know it is distinctly incident to my profession."

A whole company of the soldiers was detailed, composed of over seventy men, for this special service. By request of the detective no one but the head of the department was to know what this service really was, for he was thoroughly convinced that the brigands had means of information which would enable them to partially thwart the enterprise, unless the utmost precaution was observed. To render his movements as secret as possible, the first advance was to be made after nightfall, and the soldiers were to meet him at Resina, so that he should not be in any way identified with their movement until they were out of the city proper.

The enterprise had been carefully prepared, and as far as possible every contingency guarded against.

Arrived at the base of the mountain a patrol was

thrown out to prevent any one from ascending at the several points where passage was possible, and with orders to arrest any one who should attempt to escape from the gang above. These orders were brief and decisive. In case of the least resistance no mercy was to be shown—they were told to shoot down the fugitives at once. The men were also incited to extra effort by the promised reward, which the captain reminded them of.

These precautions having all been carefully perfected, the command was divided into three parties of equal numbers, who ascended the mountain at three known passes, with such preconcerted signals as should enable them to concentrate upon any one point in case of necessity. They were to halt for two hours' rest at midnight, provided they met with no interruption to their progress up to that time, then they were to draw together at a designated point, and hurry forward, so as, if possible, to surprise the banditti a little before the break of day. These arrangements were excellent, provided nothing happened to interfere with their proper consummation.

The organized force was enabled, by thus taking the open paths, to travel over three times the space which Marion and Walter had accomplished in the same period of time. Besides this the men were all fresh and prepared for their work, which was performed as systematically as though on parade.

The starting of the expedition just at nightfall was the crowning cause of its successful progress. If it had gone out during the hours of the day its purpose would have been at once divined, and spies would have informed the robbers in much less time than the troops could possibly have moved. Under such circumstances the purpose of the whole movement

would have been frustrated. But as it was, no spies had been on the watch to report the movement of a force at such an unusual hour, and hence the expedition met with no obstacle on the route.

The plan thus far worked like machinery, and the men entered into the spirit of the business with marked individual interest.

It was just about half an hour before daylight when the three sections of men joined each other, about sixty in number, and prepared for the last advance upon the robbers' stronghold. Not a voice was heard. The strictest silence had been enjoined, and the command moved stealthily upon its way through the rough path. Arms were carefully examined, and instructions reiterated to one and all. The gray of the morning was just appearing in the east as the foremost men came upon an outlying sentry of the gang, who was asleep with his back to a rock.

He was instantly seized, and told that if he opened his mouth to give an alarm he should die. A moment later, however, he tried to do so, for which a dagger was struck to his heart in an instant, and his body cast to one side as though it had been that of a dog. He had not anticipated such summary treatment, and his recklessness had cost him his life.

His voice had not been raised sufficiently to reach those at the cave, where another of his comrades was sleeping at his post, and so he also was secured with equal promptness, his mouth being adroitly covered so that he could not utter a sound. At the same time the whole force was quietly deploying upon the plateau, without so much as awaking a single sleeper inside the cave. The place was virtually at the mercy of the attacking party.

The man who had been on guard at the entrance of the cave struggled hard at first, but when he got his eyes fairly opened, and saw the number of the attacking party, he gave up quietly, for he knew that resistance was useless, and would only cost him his life. The men being now all prepared, and the light sufficient, concealment was no longer of any consequence, and a dozen men with ropes, handcuffs, and dark lanterns, rushed suddenly into the cave, the whole party led by the detective. He had secured a plan of the interior, carefully drawn by Walter Hammond, so that he knew just where to turn in his first dash to secure the body of the robbers.

A few shots were necessarily exchanged, but to no avail, or with no very serious result. The blaze of the dark lanterns thrown into the very eyes of the half-awakened banditti only served to dazzle and confuse them, and as their assailants had been instructed just what to do, and how to do it, there was little confusion. There was hardly one of the band, after ten minutes had transpired, who was not securely ironed, and when one proved at all troublesome his legs were also tied tightly together until resistance entirely ceased.

So complete a surprise and capture could hardly be realized even by the captors themselves.

In the meantime the detective had entered the officers' quarters, where the lieutenant was seized and ironed after a little resistance, which cost him a bayonet wound in the side, and his second officer was treated in the same manner, except that, proving still more troublesome, he was knocked senseless with the butt of a musket. Here also was found lying upon a bed of better construction than the

rest, a man evidently suffering from serious illness, his room shut off by a temporary partition. In another similar division, near by, was found a bed containing two women.

These last were informed that so long as they remained quiet they would not be interfered with, but any attempt to rise until they were ordered to do so, would result in their being handcuffed and secured like the rest of the band.

The lieutenant was then brought to the entrance of the cave, and there interrogated by the detective, at the same time being told that there was no possibility of escape for any of the gang. He was informed also that he might mitigate his own situation, as it regarded the future, by giving whatever information was required to expedite matters. He was not desired or expected to criminate himself, or his companions, but simply to facilitate present movements for the convenience of all.

This man was of far more than ordinary intelligence, and taking a correct view of the situation, he realized that every man of his command had been captured, and that no disguise or stratagem could possibly avail anything. He accepted the position, and wisely answered the questions put to him.

"Who is the sick man within there?" asked the detective, to commence with.

"Our captain."

"Mezzoni?"

"Yes."

"What is the matter with him?"

"He has fever."

"What fever?"

"Arising from a gun-shot wound."

"Where are your treasures?"

"What treasures?"

"The result of your robberies."

"Oh, they are taken charge of by the captain. We do not know," was the honest reply.

"Do you mean to say that your captain, Mezzoni, takes all the booty to himself?"

"Yes."

"Is that the truth?"

"I shall not take the trouble to tell you a falsehood," replied the robber.

"How do the men like that sort of division of the booty?" asked the officer.

"It is according to agreement. They are regularly enlisted and paid like these soldiers of the government, only they are paid ten times as much. How could they dispose of the booty? They would betray themselves upon the first operation. No. Mezzoni arranges those matters."

"Ah, I see; they are so well paid that they are satisfied at the share they receive."

"This explains much to me which has been a mystery heretofore," said the captain of the soldiers to the detective. "It is important information."

"Do those women inside belong with the band?"

"One does; she is stewardess. Her husband is the man who is tied and handcuffed yonder."

"Who is the other?"

"I do not know."

"How came she here?"

"By Mezzoni's orders."

"Held for ransom?"

"Oh, no."

"We have secured twenty-three men in the cave—is that your whole force?"

"All at this point."

"This is the headquarters?"

"It is."

At this moment the guard, who had been secured at the mouth of the cave, succeeded when unobserved in getting off his handcuffs, and leaping upon a rock beside the plateau, dropped himself off its edge, a distance of nearly thirty feet, to a ledge below, and thence climbed along, dropping again and again from one rock to another of the precipitous side. With great dexterity he avoided presenting himself as a mark for the soldiers' bullets above him. In five minutes the man was entirely out of sight, and unless he should be captured by the patrol below, he had actually made good his escape. The only one of the gang who did so.

The lieutenant of the robbers had spoken truly as to there being no treasure at the cave. With the exception of a great variety of fire-arms and ammunition, and a fair supply of provisions, there was nothing there. The arms were carefully secured and a guard left upon the spot to await further disposition of affairs, while preparations were made to march the captured brigands at once to prison in Naples. There were twenty-two of them, and besides being securely handcuffed, they were so tied together in couples that escape was rendered nearly impossible. The guard was ordered, however, to shoot down the first one who should attempt it.

All the preparations were made with the utmost care, for the officers knew very well that they had desperate men to deal with, and it was even feared that the escaped robber might bring some outlying friends of the gang to attempt a rescue. If this were to occur, both the captain and the detective had resolved to shoot down the prisoners without mercy.

Mr. Bush, the detective, had been examining the interior of the cave with lanterns to satisfy himself as to the property there, and to look for any hidden or secret places of deposit. He found in a hanging closet, in the sick man's room, a series of disguises, and among the rest a mask so constructed as to fit exactly to the flesh, and, indeed, appearing to be the natural skin of the wearer. Beneath the left eye of this mask he observed a scar, painted in so ingenious a manner as to perfectly represent a healed saber wound.

"Yes, yes," said the detective, to himself, "I have heard of this scar more than once."

He carefully secured this mask and took it along with him when he left the cave, as an important item of evidence against the leader of the outlaws.

"Who is there?" said a feeble voice from the bed.

"One whom you have met before," was the reply of the officer, as he approached the sick man.

"Ha! shoot him!" he cried, as he fell back exhausted.

"You are no longer dangerous," said the detective, as he looked upon the sick man.

"Only see that he don't get out of bed until ordered," said the officer to the soldier left to guard him.

The invalid, weak to the last degree, had said nothing during the time of the capture, and had, indeed, been lying in a sort of comatose state all the while. His arousal was but momentary at the present time, and he said no more.

It was quite a problem with his captors how best to dispose of him, for they could not make up their minds to leave him behind. He was the grand offender of the whole gang, and their victory would

be quite incomplete if they were to return without him. But while they were in this quandary the detective found the Sedan chair which had been used to convey Marion Bray up the mountain side, and arrangements were then made to take the sick man back to Naples by this means.



“WHO IS THERE?” SAID A FEEBLE VOICE FROM THE BED.

The stewardess was instructed to assist him in dressing, and as Mezzoni had become partially aroused to consciousness, this was a much easier task than had at first been anticipated. The chair was brought out to the entrance of the cave, and four of the stoutest of the soldiers were detailed to

bear it, arrangements being made to give them occasional relief.

The women were also bidden to prepare themselves to descend the mountain with the rest of the party; none but a few guards to be left behind, but in sufficient strength to hold the cave.

The detective, experienced in such matters, had been very busy in satisfying himself that the prisoners were all carefully secured beyond the possibility of escape, when the lieutenant of the robbers asked him:

“Who was that man who came among us disguised, and carried off the captive girl?”

“Walter Hammond.”

“English or American?”

“American.”

“I could have sworn that he was an American,” said the brigand.

At that moment the captain of the robbers was brought out of the cave, almost too weak to stand. As he was being put into the Sedan chair the detective came to his side, and, after a moment, exclaimed:

“I thought so! Mezzoni and Alberto Corrello are the same! And this woman is the Countess Amadeo!”

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LAST STRUGGLE.

One of the first acts of the police, after the arrest and incarceration of the brigands, was to send a few trusty men into the mountain, and after removing all the valuables, fire-arms and the like from the robbers' cave, to blow it up with gunpowder, leaving not a vestige of the villainous den, not one stone upon another. This was, as afterward appeared, the headquarters of the organization extending to the northern range of the Apennines, and its breaking up was considered of immense importance by the government.

An official examination of the secret vault in the Corrello palace showed that complete means existed there for melting down gold and silver articles into mass, a necessary process before attempting to dispose of stolen manufactured goods. There was also found to be a sort of well in one corner of the vault, into which the most unavailable and yet valuable articles had been deposited for the time being, intended, no doubt, to form a resort when other resources should at least fail to be productive.

Great sensation was caused by the success of the authorities in breaking up the den and arresting the brigands, who had so long been the terror of Naples and its environs. The government, without waiting for a trial, for once showed its promptness, and awarded the heavy sum which had been offered for the arrest of Mezzoni. This sum was apportioned to the satisfaction of the detective, the officers, and the

men who had accompanied the successful expedition. The sum received by the worthy and able Mr. Bush, in addition to that paid to him by Woolf & Co., really amounted to a small fortune to one of moderate desires.

The trial of the countess for the poisoning of her husband afforded a topic for the Neapolitan gossips of rare and continued interest, until she was found guilty and condemned to imprisonment for life. Since her arrest, a return of the peculiar condition, in which the detective had once seen her, was visible. She seemed like one walking in her sleep, and growing worse from day to day, she was finally removed from the prison to an insane asylum. Here she soon after died without having recovered her realizing sense at all.

Poor misguided, passionate woman! She reaped as she had sown.

Alberto Corrello and Mezzoni, as the detective finally discovered, were one and the same, but a protracted career of successful villainy was at last closed. It was no longer surprising that the brigands had been so well informed of all that transpired within the city, for the bravo, who acted as his own spy, was constantly in the very midst of such occurrences as he desired to note. In his double character, and possessing a remarkable faculty for disguising himself, almost in an instant, he was a most adroit and intelligent villain.

The true story of this famous brigand will ever form a romantic page in Italian history.

He was tried and condemned to death, but was remanded to prison and allowed one month to prepare for execution. There were those in Naples who knew Alberto sufficiently to express the confident opinion

that he would never die upon the gallows. This was also the remark of the English detective to the local authorities, relative to the man he had captured.

Glad to get away at last from those tragic scenes, Colonel Bray, with Marion and Walter Hammond, returned to England, where the young American became quite a lion in consideration of his gallant adventures. He was already the chosen one of Marion's heart, and the old colonel, though he disliked to part with his only and well-beloved child, yet when asked for her hand by Walter, said:

"You have won the right to demand her hand, my dear boy, and sorry as I am to lose her, still I am proud to say she is yours!"

"I will try to take good care of Marion."

"No one more able," was the reply.

As to Marion and Walter, they had settled matters between themselves long ago.

"Our bridal trip shall be to America, Marion."

"Just what I should like."

"And when shall it be, dearest?"

"Just when you please, dear Walter."

"Then let it be at once;" and so it was consummated.

Happy Marion! Happy Walter! Their trust and reliance upon each other had been tested in an ordeal of fire. Their future lives were destined to be passed in quiet and serene bliss.

But we must once more, in the closing lines with the reader, revert to vivid scenes.

It wanted about a week yet to the day appointed for the execution of Alberto Corrello, when the jailer of the prison where he was confined, on going his usual rounds in the morning, found to his amazement, that the brigand's cell was empty. Entering

it at once, he discovered that the prisoner had worked his way by patient labor and the ingenious hiding of the debris, which was necessarily created, through the thick stone wall, and had undermined a second and another wall, whence he had made his escape.

It was very evident at a glance that this work must have been in progress for many days. The bird had indeed flown.

The alarm was given at once, no time was lost, the police being sent in all directions to seek the adroit and daring criminal.

From certain indications it was apparent that the final departure from the prison had been effected very recently, and the fugitive was easily tracked toward the waters of the bay, whither he had first directed his steps. After pursuing him into several hiding places in the humblest section of the town, which adjoins the water, he was at last discovered just embarking in a boat, pulled by a couple of men.

With the quarry in sight, the chase begun in real earnest.

Four policemen were soon in one of their boats and following, but the robber had got a fair start of them, and was far out in the bay before they could make any perceptible gain upon him. The heavy police boat did, however, gradually lessen its distance from that containing the fugitive.

"He cannot have any fire-arms?" said one of the officers to another.

"Most likely not," was the reply, "but he has probably got a knife.

"Yes, he would be sure to secure some weapon, and that he could get the easiest."

"He knows how to use a knife," continued the other, "as we have seen."

"Let us give the fellow no chance this time," was the reply.

The two men who were at the oars in the robber's boat were undoubtedly incited by extraordinary promises of reward, for they were pulling toward the island of Capri at a marvelous speed, and with wonderful endurance. The police boat had four oars, the other boat two, yet the former being much the heaviest could gain but slowly upon the latter.

"If he should land at the island before us, the rascal has some dodge, by which he expects to escape us. He has confederates there perhaps," said an officer.

"Depend upon that," said another.

"But he must not land," said a third.

"Not if I can get within pistol range of him," said he who had first spoken.

The two boats had now got barely within hailing distance, but no attention was paid to the loud orders of the officers. The two oarsmen who had pulled the robber's boat must have been his devoted friends, for the mere anticipation of pecuniary reward could not induce them to run so serious a risk. The officers could now hail the boat distinctly. Capri was close at hand—that shore was the robber's only hope. Once landed there he might secrete himself, or find such friendly assistance as would protect him from his pursuers.

The distance seemed still too far for a pistol shot to tell. One moment more and the first officer, who had been standing ready, said:

"I will try it."

And a shot whistled after the boat containing the

fugitive, but it certainly did no harm, except to incite the oarsmen to renewed exertion.

"Try once more," said one of the officers to the one who had just fired.

A second discharge, but the boatmen pulled on as before, still unharmed.

The brigand sat quietly in the bow of the boat, evidently encouraging his companions now and then by an earnest word. He was perfectly cool. If he could land upon Capri, a little ahead of his pursuers, and at the point at which they were steering, he felt sure of being able to elude them. He was an adept in these matters; he had been in tighter places before and escaped, and he was not prepared to give it up yet. "One more struggle," he had said to himself.

Now came a third shot from the police. It was at nearer range and better aimed. This time the after boatman was hit, and soon drew in his oar. Alberto sprang to the man's place, and taking the oar himself, the boat shot forward more rapidly than before. The shore was but a few boat lengths off.

Another shot from the police.

Still the fugitive boat held on. The last bullet flew wide of its mark.

"Give him two together," suggested one of the officers, and at the same time preparing to fire.

A couple of shots from their revolvers followed. Alberto started this time. He was hit.

Still the brigand labored stoutly at his oar. No vital part was touched.

"Is that devil bullet-proof?" exclaimed one of the officers, thoroughly excited.

"Let us see," said another.

And shot after shot was fired. The trouble with

these discharges was that the pursuing boat was necessarily turned a little out of her course each time that the officers fired, in order to give them proper range, and thus its headway was seriously impeded, while the fugitives increased their distance, though but a trifle.

It had been a long and exciting chase, and the oarsmen in the police boat were nearly exhausted, while the perspiration poured down their faces.

The fugitives were now within three boat lengths of the landing, while the police boat was only a few yards distant from their stern.

"They will land in spite of us," said one.

"Let us pour in a volley together."

"Swing the boat's head a little."

"There—hold so."

"Now blaze away."

These orders, which came from one and another of the pursuing party, were literally fulfilled, the head of the boat being turned so as to present its broad-side to the fugitives. In this position all four of the police officers prepared to fire at the same time.

"That is our man at the after oar."

"Ay, let us all aim at him."

They did so. And the four officers actually emptied their revolvers at Alberto Corrello.

The brigand stood up in the boat, putting one hand on his heart, but uttered not a word. He then turned slowly round and fell into the sea.

It was the last of Mezzoni. The Mediterranean for a winding sheet, and his tomb the bottom of the Bay of Naples.

[THE END.]

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
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